EUGENE V. DEBS

McALISTER COLEMAN

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EUGENE V. DEBS

A Man Unafraid

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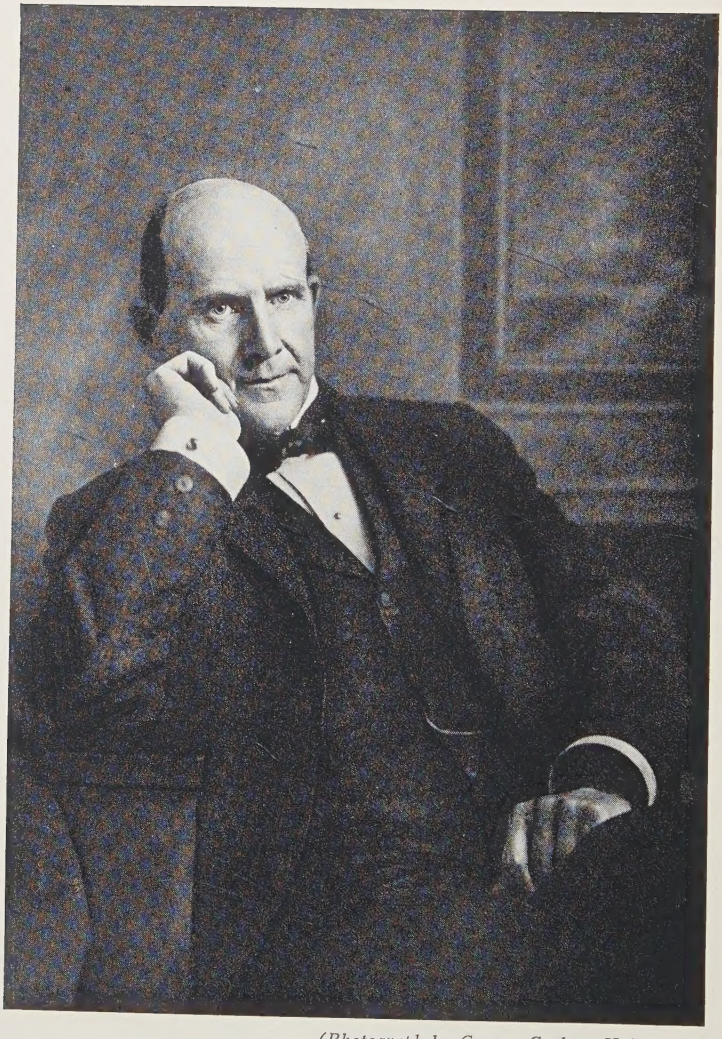

(Photograph by George Graham Holloway)

THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

EUGENE V. DEBS

A Man Unafraid

By

McALISTER COLEMAN

Illustrated

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"France evoked from the unknown the valley that may, in more than one sense, be called the heart of America. . . . The chief significance and import of the addition of this valley to the maps of the world, all indeed that makes it significant, is that here was given (though not of deliberate intent) a rich, wide, untouched field, distant, accessible only to the hardiest, without a shadowing tradition or a restraining fence, in which men of all races were to make attempt to live together under rules of their own devising and enforcing. And, as here, the government of the people, by the people, was to have even more literal interpretation than in that Atlantic strip which had traditions of property suffrage and church privilege and class distinctions, I have called it the 'Valley of the New Democracy.' "

JOHN H. FINLEY, in *The French in the Heart of America*

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Dedicated to

ARTHUR GARFIELD HAYS

A Fearless Champion of Freedom

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EUGENE V. DEBS

CHAPTER I

IN THE "VALLEY OF DEMOCRACY"

PIERRE SOLOMON was an artist. Even Old Man Peddle, Master of the Vandalia paint shops at Terre Haute, made grudging acknowledgment of that fact and looked the other way as Solomon puffed derisive clouds of smoke from his short-stemmed pipe onto the "No Smoking" signs inside the brick structure.

The fame of the coach work done in the Vandalia railroad shops had spread across all the Middle West by 1870. Skilled workers from other roads had a way of dropping off at Terre Haute to look for jobs there. The Vandalia was an insignificant link in the sprawling chains that were criss-crossing the prairie in those days, but very often coaches from some of the more important Eastern roads were sent down to Terre Haute for overhauling and ornamentation. Then Solomon was in his glory. Grunting with pleasure, he would wield a cunning brush on the sides of cars and locomotives, designing strutting roosters, flapping eagles, and at one time his masterpiece —the name of a palace car, *The Jap*, the letters consisting of combinations of minute figures of geisha girls.

One day an over-zealous official of the road on a tour

of inspection watched Solomon painting a magnificent goddess with flowing robes on the boiler of a new locomotive. "How much will that cost us?" he shouted up to Solomon. The artist looked disdainfully down. "Seeing as it's you, I will make you one for two bits," he flung over his shoulder. No official notice was taken of this slight. A live-and-let-live democracy pervaded the shop. Men stood on their own feet and looked their bosses in the eye. There were no shadows of unemployed workers falling across the men at the benches. And there were always the fat and unclaimed lands of the prairies to be seen from the dirty shop-windows.

On a soft spring day, it was May 23, 1870, Solomon came marching into the paint shop with a tall, tow-headed, blue-eyed youngster at his heels. He introduced him to Old Man Peddle, as Gene Debs, the son of Jean Daniel Debs, "the friend of mine who keeps the grocery store on Eleventh Street." Would Monsieur Peddle give him a job? Monsieur Peddle would. Gene went to work with borrowed tools scraping paint for fifty cents a day. At the end of two days he bought a scraper of his own for $1.00. The workers owned their tools then. That steel symbol of his initiation into the world of labor was treasured by Eugene Victor Debs to his dying day.

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Solomon and Jean Daniel Debs were cronies. On Sunday afternoons, or on those rare evenings when the store on Eleventh Street closed before 9 o'clock, the two would pore over Jean's collection of French writings and prints, discuss the meager news that came to them from their

common fatherland, or essay on Jean's cornet some old French songs. They were both Alsatians. Jean Daniel had been born in the prosperous town of Colmar, the capital of the District of Upper Alsace, which reared its peaked roofs above a plain near the Vosges, ten miles west of the Rhine. His boyhood had been spent under the soft shadows of the Cathedral of St. Martin, a fine old Gothic structure with magnificent sculptures. The Debs family house there was a lean, five-story affair, a typical bourgeois home. Jean's father was a well-to-do merchant, and Jean had received a good education. He was early a lover of French and German classics, and had an ardor for collecting books against the time when he should have money to quit work and go deeper into the history of his Alsace. He worked somewhat diffidently at the trade of preparing meats for the gentry of Colmar, and in 1848 when he was twenty-eight years old he left Alsace behind him forever and started for America on a sailing vessel. The voyage was tempestuous and protracted. He arrived at New York on January 20, 1849, after two months at sea. There is a story told by the Debs family to the effect that on this voyage Jean Daniel met a man who induced him to put most of the money that he had with him into a tobacco raising scheme, and that soon after Jean landed his traveling acquaintance disappeared with the bulk of Jean's fortune. At all events it was a very lonely young man with no English and little money who sent a letter back to the beautiful Marguerite Marie Betterich of Colmar, saying that if she did not instantly cross the sea her Jean might take some desperate measures. Marguerite and Jean had been engaged before the latter started for America, and promptly on receipt of Jean's letter Marguerite took ship.

The two were married in New York City on September 13, 1849.

The few French friends they had in New York told the young couple that in the Middle West they would find extensive French settlements and opportunities closed to them in the city. They went first to Cincinnati, and there they heard stories of a town in Indiana called Terre Haute, where, it was said, a new industrial center was about to be born, and where a man of Jean's ambition might well prosper. Jean went first, by stage, and Marguerite followed by the river route.

The Terre Haute which they came to in '51 was a drab river town squatting sixty feet above the sluggish Wabash. Behind it the prairies stretched out, flat, mile after mile. It was a country of extreme and vicious weathers. In the winter black tree trunks stood up in the mud to be slashed by unending rain, and in the summer red and sudden suns exploded their venom on the little frame houses. Even Jean's stout heart quailed at his first experiences in this land. He had a nostalgia for his balmy Alsace. And he sickened, and the two fled Terre Haute in their first year, returning to New York. However, they had seen enough of the Indiana town to realize its potentiality. The Terre Haute people were friendly and spoke their language, and once more Jean and his bride turned westward, this time to stay.

They located in a frame house on North Fourth Street (later to be numbered 447), near the river. Marguerite cleared out the front room of the house, and invested all that they had been able to save from Jean's unfortunate venture in a stock of groceries. It was in this house, as sub-

stantial as most which the town afforded, that Eugene Victor Debs was born on November 5, 1855.

Eugene was his mother's choice as a first name, and Jean Daniel insisted on adding Victor to do honor to his idol, Hugo.

Eugene was born into a country still pioneering. Around that word "pioneer" there has accumulated in these latter days a vast mythology. And the glorification of the pioneer goes on apace. No doubt it would startle the shades of Jean Daniel and his fellow-townsmen could they hear the laudations of them as sung by today's historians. To be sure life was tough, edged and sometimes romantic. But these men of Terre Haute were thinking not so much of building a continent as how to make a comfortable living out of the pork-packing industry which was hatching in the slaughter-houses by the river.

The first *coureurs de bois* who had come down the Wabash out of the Canadian woods had picked the high bluff where the river runs straight north and south as a good spot for a settlement. There was a wigwam village there under French rule for a while, and then, when Colonel Francis Vigo, who had been of such financial aid to George Rogers Clark in his capture of Vincennes saw the place he, too, felt that here was the natural site for a city. Government surveyors verified these findings, and by 1816, Terre Haute (French for "high land") had become the seat of Vigo County, and was already an important trading post for north and south river commerce.

By the time that Jean and Marguerite arrived most of the able-bodied men in town were cutting the throats of the hogs and floating the carcasses down the river on flat-

boats to New Orleans. Already Terre Haute had achieved local fame as the gathering place of an independent and somewhat stiff-necked people. French from Canada and New Orleans, Germans and Irish and long-legged Kentuckians mingled in a fraternity where hard work, long hours and minding one's own business were the rule. Nobody made much money. It was an egalitarian society, self-sufficient, hard-boiled, provincial. Its democracy was naïve. There was none of the self-conscious posing about it that had marked the abortive Owenite experiment at New Harmony to the south. A discouraged evangelist had said of it, "The town of Terre Haute is a beautiful village, composed of white houses situated on the left bank of the Wabash River, *but it is no place for preaching.*"

The entire countryside was astir then with rehearsals for the great drama which was to open in '61. The outstanding local orator of the day, Daniel Voorhees, was telling his Indiana friends about a man named Abe Lincoln, "Lincoln is lean and lathy: his long, dangling rake-handle arms are strong as steel; he stoops a little, is angular, a man of bony corners. His awkwardness is all in his looks: in his movements he is quick, sure and graceful. Even when he crosses his spiderlike legs or throws them over the arms of his chair, he does it with a natural grace." * Voorhees told his listeners to watch Abe Lincoln.

When tow-headed Gene was five years old, Lincoln was telling a crowd of Republicans in Cooper Union, curious to see this "prairie statesman" in action, that, in the matter of slavery, "Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as

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* Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln,* Vol. I, p. 348.

THE 15-YEAR-OLD GENE

Hugo, Voltaire and Paine were his heroes.

we understand it." But what interested the people of Terre Haute more than slavery or politics or preaching was the fact that Chicago had set up a slaughter-house "where they killed 130 cattle a day and exported to the English market." * This was a threat to all the plans for making Terre Haute "Porkopolis."

The shrill cry of bugles on a warm spring night in '61 brought Terre Haute to a sudden realization of a world beyond pork. Not more than twenty miles to the south of the town were those who held pro-slavery views hateful to liberty-loving Terre Haute. Farther south, Kentucky was brooding fitfully over secession. "In Southern Indiana the aristocracy of slave-owning was pronounced because of the migration of slave-owners across the Ohio River, but Central and Northern Indiana were regions where aristocratic manners and social pretensions based on wealth were not tolerated." †

Terre Haute's young men left one slaughter-house for another, and for four long years little Gene heard of wars and their rumors through the lips of all those who came to the Debs' home.

Jean Daniel no doubt would have gone off with a musket himself to defend the libertarian views of the "lathy" man in the White House had not a fast-growing family kept him chained to the counters which Marguerite arranged so tastefully in the front rooms of their home. Now they had moved into a larger house on Eleventh Street. Business was growing better. Jean Daniel was rapidly becoming that "substantial citizen" that Terre Haute historians were to name him. And birth was following

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* Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln,* Vol. II, p. 303.

† James Oneal, *The Socialist Review,* December, 1925.

birth. Ten children in all were born to the couple. Four of them, unable to stand the fierceness of the Terre Haute climate, died of fevers in early infancy. Of the six survivors, there were two boys, Gene and his brother Theodore, nine years younger than Gene, and four girls.

Survival was no light matter. Throughout Gene's childhood a malady called "the Wabash shakers," apparently an acute form of malaria, seized the little town. It took the shape of recurrent chills and fevers and Theodore Debs remembers crawling out into an ell of the Eleventh Street house where the sun had full play, smothered with blankets but still shaking in every little bone of him. Lack of sewage facilities and stretches of undrained marshes on the outskirts of the town were no doubt the sources of the "shakers." At all events they had their devastating way checked only by huge doses of quinine administered on broad knife blades. Gene suffered intensely from these fevers. While they do not seem to have had any lasting effect upon his amazing constitution they must have darkened his childhood.

On the whole, though, it was a sunny childhood largely due to the character of his mother, whom he and all the other children literally worshipped. They called her "Daisy" and were at her feet. This woman-worship Gene brought into later years so that he was able to say: "Still, I cannot think of woman without a feeling of reverence that amounts to worship." Between Gene and his mother there was the most tender relationship. Marguerite Marie, afire with Gallic romanticism, yearned over the handsome, sensitive boy child whom she had borne in that strange country. Gene, as responsive as a violin string to

any loving touch, gave her back his whole-souled adoration. It was her gracious figure which moved at the center of the family shrine. And shrine it was indeed. Over and over again Gene in his manhood would recall the beautiful relationships behind the prosaic grocery front. In an essay on childhood, written when he was long past middle-age, he exclaimed: "What sweet emotions the recollections of childhood inspire, and how priceless its treasured memories in our advancing and declining years! Laughing eyes and curly hair, little brown hands and bare feet, innocent and care-free, trusting and loving, tender and pure, what an elevating and satisfying influence these little gods have upon our maturer years!"

The man so often accused of seeking to "destroy the American home" believed with all his heart that "man may make the nation but woman does more—she makes the home."

One of the most touching of love letters from a son to a mother, over-sentimentalized as it may now seem to our over-sophisticated eyes, was written by Gene to Marguerite Marie on the day that she and Jean Daniel celebrated their golden wedding anniversary.

> There are two words in our language forever sacred to memory—Mother and Home. Home, the heaven upon earth, and mother its presiding angel. To us, children, here today, mother and home have realized all the longing, yearning aspirations of our souls, and now, in this blissful presence, we quaff to our mother this cup full and overflowing with the divine nectar of our love. I need not attempt to recite her deeds of devotion. There is not a page of our memory, not a tablet of our hearts, that is not adorned and beautified by acts of her loving care, in which her heart and her hands, her eyes and her soul, in holy alliance, ministered to our happiness.

Sundays for Gene and the other Debs youngsters were never the terrifying Methodist orgies which descended on many of the neighbors' children. They were festal days. Before the rest of the family was up, Jean Daniel had taken down his double-barrelled shotgun with its elaborate repousse work around the breech, and gone off through the dawn mists into the prairies. Before long he was back with fat prairie chickens in his bag, or grouse or rabbits. All the country around Terre Haute swarmed with game. There were old men there who could tell of great buffalo killings not so many years back. Deer still came down to the Wabash. Now and then there were reports of bear and wild cats.

Marguerite Marie would go into her little garden where she grew spices of an Alsatian flavor, chalot and tarragon, and soon there was high feasting on such food as only the French know how to cook. After dinner the father would read aloud from Hugo (the favorite), Voltaire, Molière or Schiller and Goethe. (Like all good Alsatians he had both French and German. Gene could find his way around in three languages.) Gene, understanding little of their content, would sway to the rhythm of the sonorous lines of that Victor over whom Swinburne was to ecstasize:

> Sun, that hast not seen a loftier head wax hoary,
> Earth, which hast not shown the sun a nobler birth,
> Time, that hast not on thy scroll defiled and gory,
> One man's name writ brighter in its whole wide girth.

This was the sort of eulogy to which Jean Daniel could say "amen."

Then, when the sun collapsed behind the straight line of the horizon and the deep darkness that follows the brief

Midwest twilight had dropped down, the hunting dogs who had stolen into the house were summarily ejected and every one went to bed, since the store was to be opened by sunup next day, and there were chores for all hands before that event.

In most small Indiana towns such a Sunday would be a matter for scandalized gossip. When Jean Daniel came to this country he was a Protestant. Marie went to mass at the Cathedral in Colmar. They both had experienced a religious sea-change. Jean Daniel could make nothing out of the hell-fire phillipics of the local parsons. Certainly Marie found no Gothic beauty in the Catholic church in town. They simply stayed away from churches, and their children with them, and there is no record that there were any neighbors asking questions. There is, however, a record of a terrifying experience of Gene's which must have left its mark. He spoke of it so passionately in his old age.

> When I was a boy . . . I went to hear a sermon one Sunday morning in old St. Joseph's Catholic Church here, and the priest delivered an address on "Hell." I shall never forget it as long as I live. He pictured a thousand demons and devils with horns and bristling tails, clutching pitchforks steeped in brimstone, and threatening to consume all who did not accept the interpretation of Christianity as given by the priest. I left that church with rich and royal hatred of the priest as a person, and a loathing for the church as an institution, and I vowed that I would never go inside a church again.*

At the Old Seminary school, under the gentle guidance of his teacher, Abbie Flagg, Gene was tearing through his lessons. When he was thirteen, he spelled through an entire term without missing a word. For this Abbie gave

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* Karsner, *Talks with Debs in Terre Haute,* page 99.

him a Bible. On the fly-leaf she wrote, "Read and obey." "I never did either," said Debs drily a half century afterwards.

The Old Seminary went in heavily for copper-plate handwriting, spelling, theology. It barely hinted at the existence of science. Now and then there was public speaking. Flushed youngsters, slicked to the last cowlick, mumbled through Patrick Henry's defiance. Gene would sit up straight then. Something in him recognized that here was the selfsame language used by the Frenchmen whose works his father read at home. Liberty, fraternity, equality. All vague, unfocussed and heroic.

When Gene, looking back on those days, said that he left school hardly able to construct a simple English sentence, he was evidently romancing a bit. There is the evidence of his schoolmates to the contrary. And Abbie Flagg's Bible.

At all events, by the time that he was fourteen he was casting restlessly about for some excuse for leaving Old Seminary. He pointed out to his father that it was high time for him to be making a living. Gene felt that the kindly Abbie Flagg had little more knowledge to impart. Besides, he wanted to do his part in meeting the heavy family expenses. Jean Daniel was inclined to agree. He had no great respect for the schooling that Terre Haute provided. Jean Daniel plucked meditatively at his big beard, and when Pierre Solomon came in that night with a letter from Alsace the two discussed the possibilities of the Vandalia paint shop as an outlet for Gene's expanding ambitions.

A few days after that talk Solomon was introducing Gene to Old Man Peddle.

CHAPTER II

LITTLE ROCKING ENGINES

THERE are more fascinating occupations in the world for a boy, whose head is filled with notions derived from the literature of Sturm und Drang, than scraping paint from the sides of railway cars. This Gene soon discovered.

"I worked there for a year and it almost killed me," he remarked of the Vandalia shop.

There were times when he sank into an acute despair common to sensitive adolescents. All his life he was to go straight from the heights to the deepest valleys. No halfway house harbored Gene. He would look up from his monotonous job and see schoolboy friends on the streets outside, and he would be ripped apart with envy and self-pity. What a fool to have left the quiet of the Old Seminary for this reeking hole!

It would seem that the prairies make a fit milieu for melancholy. Long before Ann Rutledge died and a light in his great soul went out forever, another prairie youth had been a familiar of despond. Lincoln's clowning was so often a mask for the tragic spirit beneath.

And so it was with Gene, trudging discouragedly home from the shop with torn and desolate sunsets flaring in his eyes and the moaning of winds from the flat lands in his ears. Only his mother had the power to lift him to his sunny self again. She could sense his moods, laugh them

off. And feel, too, a panic stirring at her heart as Gene told her with fierce emphasis of his need to have done with paint scraping and get away from the Vandalia yards.

Of a sudden Gene's chance for escape arrived in the person of a highly profane engineer who came into the paint shop bawling that his fireman was drunk and where the hell could he get a man who could handle the stormy end of a scoop. His eyes fell on Gene, long-muscled, slender-waisted, already close to the six feet two inches in which he was to stand up to his world. There was his man. Could he have that tow-head over there? Old Man Peddle told Gene to go along and thereby unwittingly dismissed forever his egregious paint scraper.

For that first night's run on a rattling freight engine, whose fire box roared incessantly for coal, convinced Gene that here was a man-sized job, tailor-made for him. Instead of reporting for work the next morning he beat his way on a freight on the Chicago & Eastern Indiana to Evansville. There was no job for him there, so he went on to St. Louis, where he landed a job firing a locomotive. Soon he was back at the Eleventh Street home in Terre Haute, his eyes snapping with excitement as he told of the delights of being at last a real railroader. Marguerite looked at him apprehensively. But in her heart she knew that there was no stopping him. Jean Daniel did not attempt to conceal his pride in the boy's show of independence. Gene had heard that they wanted firemen on the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad. The yardmaster there liked his looks, and presently he was firing a switch engine at night for $1 per night—double his paint shop wage.

This was towards the end of 1870. Daniel Voorhees,

the "tall Sycamore of the Wabash," had defeated Moses Dunn for Congress. The bugles of 1861 had awakened "the valley of democracy" to self-consciousness. There was eager talk of things political in Terre Haute. The fifteen-year-old fireman hung on the outskirts of excited groups of "Fighting Boys in Blue," the American Legion of its day, who had backed Grant in 1868, and were proud of the fact that their man had carried Vigo County by a 305 majority.

He heard Voorhees speak, and was carried away by the lilting eloquence of the big man. Here was a new adventure to be attempted—standing up and talking so that those below you looked up and laughed. Or wept openly. Or growled their resentment at the wrongs to which you pointed a quivering finger. But you must have something to say. You must find out about these things that so strangely agitated people. Hugo, Voltaire, Schiller and the rest were not enough. What was all this talk about Alabama Claims, annexing Santo Domingo, the threat of a war for independence in Cuba? And why was Dan Voorhees so bitter about the military clique in the White House, and the mumness of Grant?

There was a meagerly equipped private "commercial" school not far from Gene's home. And there Gene went for a few hours each day, desperately resolved to round out an educational structure which Abbie Flagg's slender hands had failed to complete.

At night he would go bumping up and down the yards shunting the little cars of those days back and forth, snatch a few hours' sleep and then hurry down to school. He had his father's weakness for book agents and he bought a copy of an encyclopædia on the instalment plan. There

was no one to guide his reading. He ploughed straight through the formidable volumes, from first to last. Remembering the effect that Patrick Henry's words had had upon him, he somehow got hold of most all the books on American history within the confines of Terre Haute. And his family remember hearing muffled denunciations of tyranny coming from under the door of Gene's room. Thomas Paine, Patrick Henry, soon took a place alongside his French heroes. In a biographical moment he wrote: "The revolutionary history of the United States and France stirred me deeply and its heroes and martyrs became my idols. Thomas Paine towered above them all. A thousand times since then I have found inspiration and strength in the thrilling words, 'These are the times that try men's souls.' "

There came a chance to take his oratory outdoors. He got his name down as one of the speakers at a patriotic assemblage. The family came to hear him proclaim the virtues of Patrick Henry. The speech was a flat failure. Gene saw the mortification on the faces of his relatives. He was stricken. It was days before he recovered from that very real agony which adolescent failure gives birth to.

But now his work had become engrossing. He was firing freights on the seventy-mile run between Terre Haute and Indianapolis. Danger rode ever with him. The light little engine with its tender and sixteen diminutive cars would lurch out of the yards at Terre Haute to go meandering across what was no more than "a right-of-way with two iron streaks on it." In winter, sleet and icy winds from a hundred miles around had full play with the men in the cab. Often Gene would climb down and hack with a slash-bar at the ice which had formed beneath the fire

box. On soft spring nights there was beauty abroad on the prairies. The boy would lean from the cab to let the winds rush against his sweating face and look up into a blue-black dome powdered with stars and a slender young moon sailing in the east.

An examining medico once asked Gene if he had ever been frightened in his youth. (His heart had been acting up after a strenuous political campaign.) Gene thought a long time. Then he confessed that once he had been "scared near to death."

The engine he was firing had run through a cut on a black night. There was a bend just beyond. Gene's train rounded it to face a headlight approaching on the tracks a few yards ahead. The driver blew a frantic call for brakes and threw his engine into reverse. Then he jumped across the cab to help Gene with the cumbersome handbrake. Together they got their train stopped. The crew of the oncoming train had worked as desperately and both trains had ground down to a halt with their cow-catchers almost touching.

That was when Gene was frightened.

2

In the panic year of 1873 Gene was eighteen years old. He was six feet of wiry muscles, hard as a spike maul, lean, slender-waisted. His candid, blue eyes lighted with interest at the approach of any friend. And he had a host of them in Terre Haute and Indianapolis and St. Louis —friends who, even then, were predicting great things for Gene. The genius for friendship which was so peculiarly his showed itself early. He held his chin up and

walked into any group of railroaders sure of a fraternal greeting. He had served his apprenticeship. He was being paid by the mile now, and was accepted by even the most captious of the veterans as a first-class "rail."

The girls of Terre Haute found Gene easy to look at. But they had difficulty in invading his man's world of rocking engines, rough-neck train crews, politics, encyclopædias, and now a new and fascinating preoccupation called vaguely "the labor question."

New to those along the Wabash at any rate, this business of dividing up those who worked with their hands and those who worked with their brains, into "capital and labor." John Swinton, one of the first journalist defenders of organized labor, who was to play a large part in Gene's career, wrote:

> . . . I can testify from personal knowledge that, in the years of my early manhood, while yet the millionaires were not among us, neither could there hardly ever be found an industrious man who could not procure work and wages anywhere. I was then, while living in various cities of the East, West and South, a boarder in many mechanics' boarding houses, and every man in all of them had a job, or could get another, at any time. The wage-earning carpenter who hired the best room in the house had a place, and never thought of being without one, as had also the printer, the watchmaker, tailor, blacksmith and shoemaker. The wages in most trades, also, were better than they are at this time, in proportion to the cost of living then and now. Everybody had a sense of manly independence; everybody was able to get along without anxiety; everybody had a pretty good time. We were all citizens of the United States of America, proud of our country's flag.

That utopia had ended abruptly with the smashing triumph of Northern business enterprise over the planter aristocracy of the South. In the first rush to consolidate

the gains which federal bayonets had thrown into their laps, Northern industrialists had overlooked the existence of a new army in their busy midst: an army of wage-workers, inarticulate to be sure, but slowly groping towards a sense of solidarity. There was coming true that prophecy of Calhoun's,* spoken while Lincoln was still a struggling Illinois politician:

> It is useless to disguise the fact. There is and always has been in an advanced stage of wealth and civilization, a conflict between capital and labor. . . . We have, in fact, but just entered upon that condition of society where the strength and durability of our political institutions are to be tested.

"The labor question," whatever that phrase might imply, had come to Terre Haute with the first big factors on the river bank. There was much talk in the cabs of the "Brotherhood." Gene entered into it with gusto. Here was something new that interested his people. He must find out about it.

"The Brotherhood of the Footboard" was the original name of the union of engineers, firemen and machinists, organized in 1863 by the aggressive W. O. Robinson, in protest against piecework and reduced wages which were being forced upon the men by the management. One disastrous strike was enough to take all the militancy out of the organization which adopted a year later the more dignified title of "The International Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers." Under the cautious leadership of Charles Wilson, an engineer on the New York Central & Hudson River Railway, the brotherhood set out de-

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* *The Rise of American Civilization,* Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, page 211.

liberately to win "the good graces of the employers through elevating the character of its members and thus raising their efficiency as workmen." *

Basking in the light of the approval of the management, the engineers had grown both in membership and financial ability. Wilson went up and down the land counselling against strikes and urging that the brotherhood become incorporated. One of the clauses of the articles of incorporation was to read:

> Be it further enacted, That any Sub-Division organized, under this act . . . who shall, by advice or counsel, induce any engineer, or engineers, to interfere, by a *strike* with the transportation of the mails or other Government property, or who shall refuse to expel any of their members who shall so interfere shall forfeit their charter, and all the rights and interests they may have in any common fund of this brotherhood that may be accumulated at that time. †

Other unions of those days, printers, iron molders, cigar makers, bricklayers, iron and steel workers looked with apprehension upon what they regarded as Wilson's attempt to "enslave the engineers." Wilson's rank and file, however, were gagged by the good wages of after-the-war prosperity, and it was not until Jay Cooke & Company blew up with a bang in the autumn of 1873 that the engineers began to realize just where their leadership was taking them. Then they went to work to oust Wilson only to put in his place a leader fully as conservative in the frock-coated person of P. M. Arthur.

The Cooke explosion echoed from Philadelphia along

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* *History of Labor in the United States,* by John R. Commons and Associates Vol. II, page 63.

† Ibid, page 66.

the most insignificant of the new railway lines which were pushing westward. Cooke's banking house had put its great resources and adroit advertising skill back of the promotors of the Northern Pacific. So industriously had Cooke spread reports of the value of the land grants which an over-generous government was bestowing upon almost any one who had plans for a new railroad in his vest pocket, that jocose brokers in New York and Philadelphia were referring to the whole Northwest section as "Jay Cooke's banana belt."

From the beginning, the capitalization of the Northern Pacific, whose construction was started early in 1870, was fantastic. Promises of vast fortunes to be made in this new railroad bonanza issued daily from Cooke's offices, and in 1871 a trainload of Eastern newspaper men, tuned up to sing the glories of the Northwest, was sent throughout the territory. But in spite of the willing assistance of Congress in passing any legislation which Cooke asked for and the fact that speculation in railroad shares was the chief activity of almost every Eastern investor, the Northern Pacific did not get along as rapidly as Cooke had hoped. The banker fired the president of the road, forced certain economies on its management and busied himself in Washington interviewing politicians from Vice President Colfax down.*

In April of 1873, he was desperately trying to secure additional capital. But by now, a Congressional committee was looking into the dark places where moved the figures connected with the notorious Credit Mobilier. Americans were reading with scandalized eyes of the bribery of their

* *The Story of the Western Railroads,* Robert E. Riegel, page 127.

representatives in the Senate and House, and, even, according to the Democratic press, of the Vice President himself. Oakes Ames, of Massachusetts, and James Brooks of New York, Representatives, were flatly accused by the investigating committee of having sold stock in this French-named promotion company for the Union Pacific to fellow-members of Congress "with intent to influence the vote of such members." The financing of new roads, but yesterday such a hugely profitable adventure, had now passed under the shadow of a nation-wide suspicion. The Congress which had loaned millions of dollars to the pioneering railway companies (little of which was ever to be repaid) and upon which the companies in turn issued millions on millions of watered stocks, the Congress which had thrown away forever thousands and thousands of acres of public land as a free gift to the railroads in the shape of land grants, was now to develop a sudden attack of bad conscience. Men looked askance at Cooke and his selling crews. A bad winter and tight money killed a new syndicate with which Cooke hoped to rehabilitate the fast-failing fortunes of the road, and on September 18, 1873, the doors of "the most important banking house in America" were closed.

Cooke's fall brought down the whole house of cards which had railway speculation for its unstable foundation. Other banking houses with their vaults full of railroad securities whose value was no greater than the paper on which they were engraved, went down with Cooke. Loans were called. There was no market for the securities which Western printing presses were turning out in optimistic over-abundance. Construction gangs were dismissed, farmers mortgaged "everything except the honor

of their wives" to meet their losses in railway shares. Many of the most important roads in the Midwest were in a state of what Charles Edward Russell has called "picturesque wreckage," and rail investments, once the fair-haired children of Wall Street, were kicked out into a heartless world.

Everywhere farmers whose savings had been snuffed out overnight, and workers whose wages had been cut to the bone, were cursing the slick Eastern promoters and coming together in blind protest against that unseen thing which had struck at them from the dark.

Gene heard of a march of 20,000 workless workers in Chicago on a freezing December day in 1873, and his heart skipped a few indignant beats as he read their pathetic appeal for relief at the City Hall. In New York free soup kitchens were opened throughout all the working-class districts. The prosperity myth had proved to be just that. It was not possible to go on forever, capitalizing and recapitalizing the drunken generosity of the government. And when the end came, it was the workers, organized in only a few skilled trades, with no competent spokesman, no influential economic backing, who took the blow square. Union after union went down in the crash. Only among the farmers, still nourishing their traditions of independence, was there any organized protest. In the Northwest they met at a convention which set forth the demands of the embattled grangers. These were:

1. Congress should pass a law fixing maximum freight and passenger rates between the states, and should grant no subsidies to any private corporation.
2. The government should build railroad lines to compete with and effectively regulate the private railroad companies.

3. Home manufactures should be promoted in order to lessen necessity for and to cut the costs of transportation.
4. Debt should ever be held as one of our greatest enemies.
5. One industry should not be protected at the expense of the other.*

In all the small towns in Indiana, farmers and workers gathering about the hitch-racks on Saturday evenings discussed their common plight. In the East labor leaders were appealing to the workers "to join hands with the farmers of the West in their courageous war upon monopolies of all kinds." There was agitation enough, but it lacked direction. The only outstanding labor leader whom the war had developed, William H. Sylvis of the Moulders' Union, had died in 1869 and the only important attempt at national organization of the workers, the National Labor Union, had fallen to pieces when its candidate for President, Judge David Davis of Illinois, had switched to the support of Horace Greeley in the campaign of 1872.

Several events, with which Gene had no direct contact but which were to color his future, took place at the beginning of the prolonged "railway panic." Hysterical police with drawn clubs charged a meeting of the unemployed in Tompkins Square, New York, and barely missed the enormous head of a squat cigar maker named Samuel Gompers. Red flags had been shown at that meeting. References had been made to the bravery of the Communists on the barricades in Paris in 1871. All the way home, the stocky cigar maker, who had been on familiar terms with the German radicals, banging their steins on the tables of Schwab's saloon on First Street, pondered

* *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States,* Nathan Fine, page 60.

over the effectiveness of such extreme leftward movements as the one in which he had just participated.*

> I was in no way connected with the arrangement of this demonstration and was present as an intensely interested workingman and the import of the situation bore in upon me. As the fundamentals came to me, they became guideposts for my understanding of the labor movement for years to come. I saw how professions of radicalism and sensationalism concentrated all the forces of organized society against a labor movement and nullified in advance normal, necessary activity. I saw that leadership in the labor movement could be safely entrusted only to those into whose hearts and minds had been woven the experiences of earning their bread by daily labor.

A call appeared in the *Workingman's Advocate*, signed by a number of union officials, saying that "already the farmers of the West and Northwest are driven to desperation by the bold, bare-faced robbery of the fruits of their industry by legalized monopoly, and have organized powerful State organizations. . . . Let not the failures of the past deter us from making renewed efforts, but profiting by our dear-bought experience build up and perfect an organization. . . ." They asked every trade union organization to send delegates to a convention to be held in Cleveland on the 15th of July, 1873, and the result of their appeal was the formation of the Industrial Brotherhood the preamble to whose platform was later to be lifted almost bodily by the mystic and, at this time, underground organization, The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor.

Wandering through the Industrial Brotherhood convention, was "a slender man, under average height, with mild, blue eyes behind glasses." He plucked nervously at

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* *Seventy Years of Life and Labor* by Samuel Gompers, Vol. I, p. 97.

a blonde moustache which completely hid his mouth and fell down in two points around his chin, he seemed to be suffering from a perpetual cold in his nose. This was Terrence V. Powderly, the very mention of whose name a few years later was to drive Eastern editors to the verge of apoplexy.

And in this year in Indianapolis men in workers' boarding houses were discussing an obscure doctrine called Socialism, which was strangely agitating the German workers among them.

Then, from an unexpected source, came a check to the active interest which Gene was taking in the sudden entrance of the labor question into his scheme of things.

CHAPTER III

"THE TOW-HEADED KID AT TERRE HAUTE"

UNKNOWN to Gene, his mother for nearly a year now had been harried with anxiety for her boy's safety. Those were days of wholesale massacres of train crews. The *Terre Haute Gazette* printed regularly casualty lists resulting from railway accidents of a range and violence unknown to the railroaders of today. Unballasted and hastily constructed roads killed off engineers and firemen with a wanton destructiveness. They were thrown from tilting engines, hurled from defective rails, burned to death under frail wooden cars. Unless a large number of passengers was killed, deaths and maiming among train crews received scanty notice.

On the 5th of October the express train bound East, on the Great Western road met with a serious accident near Provincetown, Ont., which resulted in the killing of William Cooper, Engineer; D. A. Irving, fireman; H. Andrews, express messenger; and an unknown man who was in the baggage car at the time of the accident. The accident was caused by the breaking of one of the wheels of the tender.

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On the night of the 16th of October, the engine, baggage, smoking and one passenger car of the West-bound train on the Erie road were thrown from the track by striking a horse, near Genessee. Engineer Clark was killed and the fireman, a brakeman, and a tramp were badly injured.

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A boiler of a locomotive on the Alexandria, Manassas and Orange Railroad exploded at Abingdon, Oct. 31st, killing fireman, J. W. Jetter, and the engineer, Robert Wilson.

The papers were filled with such grimly terse items as these. The story of every accident was scanned by the anxious eyes of Marguerite; there was a sinking of her heart each evening when Gene left the house for the yard. The long-drawn shriek of a train whistle on the prairies mingled with her disastrous dreams. Soon it became evident that there could be no peace for her so long as her Gene rode an engine.

When the realization of the tortures which his mother was suffering at last dawned upon the boy he made a heart-breaking decision. Deliberately he turned his back upon a world over whose luring threshold he had but just stepped. In October, 1874, he threw up his job on the road, and went to work clerking at the wholesale grocery house of Hulman & Cox.

This was the largest wholesale grocery house west of New York. Gene's father was a customer and friend of Hulman, and the latter was glad to take into his employ an oncoming youngster like Gene.

Gene was cheerful enough at home about his new job. But Eugene Victor Debs in a grocery concern, surrounded by a drab white-collared army of clerks, was an eagle in a canary cage. He would go from his ledgers to the meeting places of the railroad men, keep his ears cocked to every bit of news from that world which he had so regretfully left, and for their part his cronies of the rail studiously avoided mention of groceries and made it appear that, for them at any rate, Gene was still firing an engine.

They gave proof of their confidence in Gene when, in

MARGUERITE DEBS

The mother Gene idolized.

February, 1875, the full-bearded, jovial Joshua Leach came down to Terre Haute to organize a local lodge of the newly-formed Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen. They told Josh that his man was Gene Debs up at Hulman's, and when Josh called a meeting of the more influential firemen and stood up and swung his fists and talked organization to them, he picked out Gene, leaning eagerly forward in the front row, as the natural leader for Vigo Lodge No. 16, which was then and there formed.

The firemen had decided on an organization of their own in 1873 just before the panic. Leach organized it at Port Jervis, N. Y. When Josh came to Terre Haute, the organization had 4,000 members, and was building up a reserve fund for insuring the precarious lives of the scoopers. The official spokesmen for the Brotherhood were announcing to the world that theirs was

> An order for the protection and elevation—mentally and socially—of all classes and denominations of mankind who step on the footboard for the purpose of working their way to a higher position. The B. of L. F. is not a society organized for evil purposes. . . . We seek not to regulate and maintain our salaries alone, but we do more than this—let it be said to our credit—we educate our members for the position which they daily toil for; caution them against the wine cup and the disastrous results arising from the same, for it is evident that those who are so given are an injury to us. We do not show a cold shoulder to them until such times as we find they are beyond redemption, and lay our members open to censure by every person, not our officers alone, for to them we look and earnestly hope for a speedy dismissal of any such. . . . With us we combine only the men of the footboard, consequently our aim and belief are alike, and to place such men upon the locomotive as have (sic) received their education through our Order, is merely to give to the public a class of men whom trust can be reposed in, for they control that valuable piece of machinery

> which requires a man of steady habits and nerves. This the public knows, as do our officers and engineers, and such encouragement as has been given us by the same, only goes to show that "Benevolence, Sobriety and Industry" is doing its work.

Gene Debs was promptly made secretary of the lodge, which meant that he handled the detail work of organization. He took very seriously all the official mandates arriving from headquarters with their constant exhortations to "Benevolence, Sobriety and Industry."

Josh Leach went away from Terre Haute proud of his choice of Gene. He told the crowd at the Brotherhood headquarters: "I have put a tow-headed kid in at Terre Haute, and some day he will be at the head of the order." He said to Gene after that first meeting, "My boy, you're a little young, but I believe you're in earnest and will make your mark in the Brotherhood." Earnest was a small word for it. Here was a chance to escape for a while from the monotony of clerical work amid a dull lot of penpushers and Gene made the most of it. He talked "Brotherhood and Organization," and had the good sense not to bear down too hard upon the sobriety feature of the brotherhood slogan when he went among the hard-drinking men of the Terre Haute roads. The lodge meetings increased in size, the original twenty-five grew to forty. The members listened in respectful silence as their secretary rose and read the minutes so meticulously kept in a fine, clear script. And, if at times a speech which had been stumblingly and often profanely delivered by a disgruntled fireman, who wanted "the order to do something and do it damn quick," came back in rolling phrases

faintly reminiscent of Hugo, Patrick Henry and Bob Ingersoll, there was no complaint from the surprised membership. Gene was the boy who could certainly sling English, and he would show them in the cities that the Terre Haute lodge had nothing to apologize for when it came to secretary's reports.

There was another purple moment in that year, Gene was elected president of the Occidental Literary Club. This was an organization of youngsters who were bitten with the cultural bug then swarming throughout Indiana. It gave Gene and other young local orators the chance for a sounding board. There was no subject under the American sun which the Occidental Literary Club was not prepared to tackle. At the first meeting it was decided that none other than Colonel Ingersoll should lend his tremendous influence to the launching of the project by coming down to Terre Haute and delivering one of his famous lectures. Gene was chosen to take care of the correspondence with Ingersoll's manager. The latter's response, in which terms were mentioned, fell with the nature of a bomb among the young optimists. They gulped when Gene read it to them, pulled their belts close, and then voted that each member should pay into the treasury five dollars for the underwriting of the lecture. Gene was instructed to write back that Ingersoll should come along, and on a Monday night of the week in which the Colonel was to deliver his talk, squads of young men were hurrying through all Terre Haute with posters and buckets of paste. Nothing was sacred. Church fronts were liberally plastered with portraits of the famed agnostic. Public buildings, even the local jail, all received the attention of

the Ingersoll promoters. The next morning an old resident remarked "this town looks like it had atheistic smallpox."

When Ingersoll, sighing with relief, got off the stuffy little day coach from Indianapolis, he was met at the station by Gene and as depressed a group of youngsters as could be found in all Indiana. For it was raining as only the skies above Terre Haute can rain. No one was on the streets. Indeed, who would venture forth on such a night to hear even the golden eloquence of an Ingersoll? "Cheer up, boys," said the genial Bob, "I'll let you off on the contract and we'll have a good time anyway. Now let's get something to eat." While their distinguished visitor was putting away a man-sized meal, the members of the Occidental Club regarded him with wide-eyed but silent admiration. Only their president found tongue to ask the thousand-and-one questions about the arts of public speaking which had been bottled up within him ever since the fatal Patrick Henry episode. Ingersoll was charmed by Gene. And though the boy's heart dropped again as they made their way to Dowling's Hall through the tempest, still Gene was elated to think that here he was on intimate terms with a man who could make audiences from coast to coast do all those things which Dan Voorhees had been able to do in years past.

When, at length, Gene dared to step out onto the platform and the curtain went up, and he looked for the first time out across the house, a mighty wave of relief swept the young chairman into a graceful and poetical introduction. The place was jammed. It seemed as though the entire citizenry of Terre Haute, soaked to the skin though they were, had succumbed to the lure of the poster cam-

paign. And Ingersoll was at his best. His lecture was, "The Liberty of Man, Woman and Child." He talked of tolerance and the need for brotherhood; had a good word to say about working people; gave them his views of the attitude of civilized man toward religion; and won them quite definitely, so that the high chandeliers shook with applause when he had ended. It was a complete triumph. Gene had won over the hostility of the elements and the studied indifference of small-town folks to anything new. The Occidental Literary Club's headquarters soon sprouted chairs, tables and the beginnings of a library from the proceeds of the Ingersoll lecture, and when Gene went down to Hulman's next Monday, the respectful eyes of his fellow clerks followed him to his high stool in front of the ledger. Here was one of them, only twenty years old, who had brought the great Ingersoll to town, made a bang-up speech and got his name onto the front page of the *Gazette*.

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Hard times still held the working people in their grip. The shadow of them fell from the high places of directors' meetings clear down to the pine-board shanties on the banks of the Wabash, where the common laborers of Terre Haute dragged out their existence on the fringes of what was ironically called "Bagdad"—the "red-light" district.

In the fiscal year 1875–76, only 165 out of 691 railroads paid any dividends, and soured stockholders were harrying managers to the point of desperation, with their insistence on wage-cuts and more wage-cuts. And as the railroads went, so went the wage-scales in most other in-

dustries. There was a smouldering hatred between those who were doing the actual work of pushing the rails across the continent and those who were taking the bulk of the rewards along the Eastern seaboard. No longer could it be said, as a lyrical railroad commission once did say, "the whistle of a locomotive would be the sweetest music a resident of the broad prairies of Dakota could hear, and the mere rumor that a party of railroad surveyors had been seen in a particular locality was enough to fill the heart of every settler with joy, and cause visions of town-site and county seat speculation to color with all the beauteous hues of the rainbow his dreams at night." A more apt summary of the changed sentiment towards the railroads was expressed in "An Indignant Taxpayer's Sentiment on the County Debt": *

We will come out upon our farms,
We will not pay this debt,
We'll get out an injunction quick,
Let the bondholders sweat.

We will not pay one cent of tax,
We have no dollars to spare,
To be mixed up in such a deal,
Would make an angel swear.

We'll hang the first official up,
To the nearest wagon tongue;
Who dares to make a levy or tax
By a necktie will be strung.

Butter had disappeared from the workingman's table in the cities of the Midwest. Meat was to follow butter.

In New York, Gompers was attempting to rally the

* *The Story of the Western Railroads,* Robert E. Riegel, page 145.

cigar makers to unionism. Here and there German socialists, a handful of American-born liberals, the colorful Victoria Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin among them, would break out with sententious "calls" to the workingmen to rise and throw off their chains. But while the radicals held plenty of conventions, passed countless resolutions, and were forever issuing manifestoes announcing the immediate downfall of capital, the nation as a whole remained perversely blind to the very real menace which lay in wait down wretched side streets in the indescribable slums of New York and Pittsburgh and Chicago. The middle people chortled over the antics of Victoria and Tennessee, were disgusted by the violent language used in the multitudinous manifestoes, and felt certain that the answer to the bitter cry of the unprivileged was more soup kitchens.

Then, in 1877 the eyes of "respectable" America were opened. Once more they were focussed, and with startled intensity, upon the railroads. This time the foreground was occupied not by a group of speculative adventurers in counting houses, but by an army of working men, track layers, switchmen, brakemen, section hands. These came to the consciousness of America with a rough and sudden impact. In 1877 there was serious talk of a new civil war which would bring down the republic.

CHAPTER IV

"THE GREAT UPHEAVAL"

ON a June day in 1877, clerks of the Pennsylvania Railway and the Baltimore & Ohio posted notices in the shops, roundhouses, and throughout the yards of their lines, announcing a reduction in wages. Four years before, similar notices had appeared. In 1873 men scowled at the bulletins and went off muttering. Now they tore them down and spit on them. A good deal better, they said, to starve quickly to death walking the picket line than starve slowly stoking an engine or working in a shop. All that long, tense month while wages were being cut, in response to the Pennsylvania's lead, on one road after another, there was a gathering agitation. No outsiders were needed to inform the railroaders of their predicament. In the middle of July, throughout the Pittsburgh district and clear down to West Virginia, men took counsel of despair, summoned what strength they had and struck, blindly and furiously against reductions in wages.

A paper organization, formed in Allegheny City on June 2nd, called "The Trainmen's Union," became a flesh and blood reality. The strikers rushed to join it. Organizers for the mysterious "Knights of Labor" came into Pittsburgh and the coal fields thereabouts, urging railroad men and miners to stand firm.

In the presence of this first large-scale demonstration of the very real existence of "The Class Struggle" in Amer-

ica, officialdom from State governors to sheriffs were seized with panic. Into Pittsburgh swarmed the ragged ranks of the more desperate of the unemployed, and almost immediately there was rioting on the streets, led for the most part by irresponsible hangers-on who follow the conflicting camps in every industrial struggle. The engineers and firemen had no brotherhood organizations on most of the roads affected. The strikers kept pretty well off the streets. But on the night of Sunday, July 21st, the skies above Pittsburgh glowed with fires rising from 1600 cars, more than 100 locomotives, and all the Pennsylvania shops, materials and buildings between 28th Street and the Union Depot. In Scranton, where the miners were standing shoulder to shoulder with the railroaders, members of "The Citizens Corps," an undercover organization hastily gotten together by the panic-stricken Mayor, fired point blank into a crowd, killing three and wounding one. At Martinsburg, W. Va., where the strike had tied up all the roads entering the town, troops clashed with the crowd. In many places militia, which had been called out during the first days of the strike, fraternized with the workers. An investigating committee of the Pennsylvania Legislature later reported:—

> From the first commencement of the strike, the strikers had the active sympathy of a large portion of the people of Pittsburgh. The citizens had a bitter feeling against the Pennsylvania Railroad Company on account of, as they believed, an unjust discrimination by the railroad company against them in freight rates, which made it very difficult for their manufacturers to compete successfully with manufacturers farther West, and this feeling had existed and been intensified for years, and pervaded all classes. A large portion of the people also believed that the railroad company was not dealing fairly by its men in making the last reduction in wages, and the tradesmen with whom

the trainmen dealt also had a direct sympathy with the men in this reduction, for its result would affect their pockets.

The large class of laborers in the different mills, manufactories, mines, and other industries in Pittsburgh and vicinity, were also strongly in sympathy with the railroad strikers, considering the cause of the railroad men their cause, as their wages had also been reduced for the same causes as were those of the railroad men, and they were not only willing but anxious to make a common fight against the corporations. This feeling of aversion to the railroad company and sympathy with the strikers was indulged in by the Pittsburgh troops to the same extent that it was by the other classes, and as many of them had friends and relatives in the mob, it is not much to be wondered at that they did not show much anxiety to assist in dispersing the crowd and enforcing the law.*

Finding that their own militia had failed them, the business men of Pittsburgh sent frantic calls to Philadelphia with the result that 600 Philadelphia militiamen came into town to clear the tracks for the movement of trains. The local militia was sent home in disgrace. They got out of their uniforms and joined the crowds which had collected at a railway crossing at 26th Street. Stones were thrown. The nervous youngsters from Philadelphia let go a volley which killed twenty-six persons. Then the militia turned and ran to the shelter of the roundhouse. From all parts of town, at the word of the shooting, workers gathered. For one riotous night they laid siege to the alien militia, burning the machine shops surrounding the roundhouse and firing constantly into every opening of that shelter. At dawn the troops withdrew in a confused retreat, and for the whole of that day Pittsburgh was in the hands of a mob, "made up of some railroad men, mill men, boys, roughs

* *Thirty Years of Labor,* T. V. Powderly, page 200–201.

and tramps." * It was estimated that $5,000,000 worth of railroad property was destroyed.

Across the river, R. A. Ammon, to be known thereafter as "Boss" Ammon, the head of the Trainmen's Union, took the situation into his competent hands, and for four days he operated, without one mishap, passenger and mail trains whose crews were not on strike. He was in complete charge of the division. The regular officials were in hiding.

The Pittsburgh rioting died down after the hasty departure of the Philadelphia militia. But the strikes spread. There was trouble on the Erie at Hornellsville, N. Y., and Buffalo, and there were scuffles at the terminals in Toledo, Louisville, Chicago, St. Louis, and even distant San Francisco. The strike of the switchmen on the Michigan Central precipitated a violent battle in Chicago on July 23rd, as a result of which the police stormed into the headquarters of the Socialists, who had been everywhere exhorting the workers, and arrested two of their leaders, Albert R. Parsons and Philip Van Patten. Promptly the Socialists called indignation meetings. A special strike committee was set up which demanded the eight-hour day and an increase in pay of not less than twenty-five cents for all types of labor. The revolt of the railroaders was developing into a general strike. In St. Louis a committee of workers in various industries ran the town for a week. In New York the hard-driven cigar makers took heart, and under the leadership of Sam Gompers and Adolph Strasser, president of the young Cigar Makers' International Union, marched out of the dirty factories to sulk in their east side tenements.

Now the courts, resurrecting old conspiracy laws against

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* *History of Labor in the United States,* John Commons, page 190.

organized labor, swung into the battle alongside Federal troops and militia. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, like the firemen's brotherhood, which had taken no official cognizance of the hell popping under their dignified noses, lined up on the side of "law and order." On the last day of July, the brakemen threw up the sponge and voted to return to work at the old terms. The miners snarled when they had word of this, and voted to stay out. But throughout the country the fury of the back streets had exhausted itself. There was to be, after all, no civil war. The foundations of the Republic were scorched a bit, but they stood firm. In the cities, business forces, recovering from their hysteria, sat down with the lawyers and judges to devise ways and means against a repetition of their scare.

The great upheaval of 1877 was at an end. It found the brotherhoods one day to be termed by Gene "the aristocrats of labor," earnestly endeavoring to explain to a nerve-shattered public that their membership had taken no part in the violence. That it was their policy to "ignore strikes."

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT FOR STATUS

"BENEVOLENCE, Sobriety, Industry." The words of their motto hung on a large banner before the eyes of the firemen assembled at the fourth annual convention of the brotherhood in Indianapolis in September, 1877. The members of Vigo Lodge, No. 16, had picked Gene for their delegate. He was a bit nervous when he rose to make his first speech at a labor convention on the subject of the strikes whose echoes ran round the convention hall. Said Gene:

> The continual reduction of the price of labor was the direct cause of the recent strikes which terrified the entire nation. A strike at the present time signifies anarchy and revolution, and the one of but a few days ago will never be blotted from the records of memory. The question has often been asked, "Does the brotherhood encourage strikers?" To this question, we most emphatically answer, "No, brotherhood." To disregard the laws which govern our land? To destroy the last vestige of order? To stain our hands with the crimson blood of our fellow beings? We again say, "No," a thousand times "No!"

The applause was polite. The youngster from Terre Haute had spoken his piece well. But here and there men looked thoughtfully out of the windows of the hall, wondering what they would have done had they stood before the bayonets in Pittsburgh. "Benevolence, sobriety and industry" were all very fine but just how would you laugh

off a wage cut when you came home from the yards on a Saturday night? And what was to prevent the "big boys" from plastering on more cuts and still more? Certainly not this shrill insistence on respectability. Some of them thought that the spokesman from No. 16 did protest too much. But Gene came back to the treadmill of groceries very well satisfied with himself. He had helped make it known that the brotherhood was safe for the employers. Riley McKeen, president of the Vandalia, congratulated him on his speech.

With the writing of the minutes of the meetings of Vigo Lodge, held twice a month, with official communications from the brotherhood's headquarters to be answered, with the jacking up of delinquent members, and finally with the expanding affairs of the Occidental Literary Club on his hands, every minute away from the grocery house was full.

In Indianapolis Gene had come upon the beguiling person of James Whitcomb Riley wandering absent-mindedly through the streets in search of copy.* He was writing verses then and covering local items for *The Indianapolis Journal*. Riley and Debs hit it off at their first meeting. The wistful dialect verses of Riley delighted Gene, and he promptly asked Riley to come to Terre Haute to read them before the members of the Occidental. Riley drifted genially down; read his poems to a half-filled house; was quite good-natured about the lack of response upon the part of his audience, accustomed to the more elegant phraseology of the poets of those days; had a drink or

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***Riley never could find his way around Indianapolis, or any other city, for that matter, without asking directions.—Author's note.**

two of Jean Daniel's good liquor, and went back to the city room swearing that Gene Debs was a fine fellow.

Riley came back many times to Terre Haute and he always stayed with the Debs family. He made generous tribute to the town, which stubbornly maintained an indifference to his readings, in a poem which he called: *Regarding Terry Hut.* One of the verses read:

> Take even statesmanship, and wit,
> And gineral git-up-and-git,
> Old Terry Hut is sound clean through!
> Turn old Dick Thompson loose er Dan
> Voorhees—and where's they any man
> Kin even hold a candle to
> Their eloquence? And where's as clean
> A fi-nan-seer as Rile' McKeen—
> Er purer in his daily walk,
> In railroad er in racing stock!
> And there's Gene Debs—a man 'at stands
> And jest holds out in his two hands
> As warm a heart as ever beat
> Betwixt here and the judgment seat!
> All these is reasons why I put
> Sich bulk o' faith in Terry Hut.

Outstanding among Gene's heroes was Wendell Phillips. Of all the anti-slavery group (always excepting John Brown),* Phillips most completely captured Gene's imagination. The youth knew by heart the old abolitionist's career, from the time he left a cushioned life, as one of Harvard's most distinguished graduates, to the days following the Civil War, when he exclaimed: "New occasions

* "The greatest hero of them all was John Brown. . . . John Brown, when the crisis came, stood forth almost alone and struck the blow—the immortal blow that put an end to that most infamous of human institutions—slavery." *The Negro Workers,* E. V. Debs (a pamphlet).

teach new duties," and flung all his remaining vigor behind the cause of Labor.

The agitator came to Terre Haute at Gene's invitation. But again the house was small. Phillips courteously offered to cut down his fee but the president of the Occidental Literary Club would not listen to this. Gene took the old radical home, pumped him with questions about the early days of the abolition movement. Phillips told Gene that no one could appreciate the real sufferings which the pioneers in that movement had undergone.

The impress which Phillips made upon Gene went deep. Years after Gene wrote:

> I was too young to realize the monumental work, the immortal achievement of Wendell Phillips until long after it was completed. Slavery had a firm grip on Indiana where I lived, and we did not learn of Phillips and Garrison in our school books. But in the years that followed, we began to hear about these apostles of freedom. Their cause had finally triumphed. They were no longer infamous but honorable, no longer monsters but heroes. Garrison's work was finished, Phillips's just begun. Phillips saw with prophetic eye that the abolition of chattel slavery was but the prelude to the infinitely greater struggle for the emancipation of the working classes of all races and colors on the face of the earth. He clearly foresaw the mission and comprehended the import of the labor movement, and once more his great heart, his magnificent abilities and his moving eloquence were enlisted in the cause of oppressed and suffering humanity. He glorified the cause of labor and declared the labor movement the greatest of the age. He wrote labor's platform of protest against exploitation under the wage system and its declaration of revolt against that cruel and oppressive system. . . .
>
> Having myself joined the labor movement in 1875, I came to hear and know more and more of Wendell Phillips. He was then in the lecture field and I proposed to a little club of which

I was a member that we secure him if possible for a date at Terre Haute. The arrangement was soon made and on November 25, 1878, he came to our city to fill his engagement. It was the first and only time I ever met him. He was then sixty-seven, erect as a pine, and the handsomest figure of a courtly elderly gentleman I had ever seen. His locks were white as snow, but his complexion was florid, his step agile, the grip of his hand firm and hearty, and he appeared, notwithstanding his years, a tower of strength. Yet, alas, less than seven years later he fell into his last sleep.

The fires of his earlier life had softened to a mellow glow at sixty-seven, and the asperity of the fighter seemed entirely gone. The majestic form, the elegant figure, the graceful carriage, the gentle manner, the benignant smile, all betokened the sweet and soulful nature of the genuine gentleman. He was the very essence of bodily and spiritual refinement. Every line in his handsome countenance denoted nobility of birth and breeding. His eyes were kind and gentle as those of a mother, and I remember wondering how eyes filled with such tenderness could once have flashed with the fires of volcanic wrath which burst from his indignant soul. His voice was soft and sweet and musical as the tinkling of a silver bell, and his manner gracious and urbane without the slightest affectation. I was too young to study critically the features of our illustrious guest, but I remember distinctly feeling that I stood in the presence of true greatness. Behind the gentleman I could visualize the man, the warrior, the liberator, the humanitarian, the lover of his kind. I did not look upon him with awe, but with reverence and love. He had fought for me and my class with all his strength of body and soul his whole life long. He had been hated, denounced and socially exiled that I and mine might live and enjoy, aspire and fulfill; and here he stood, and with my own eyes I could now behold the man, meditate upon his greatness, and find inspiration in his noble example. Here before me stood the hero who had challenged the world wicked, malevolent power of human slavery and had preserved unsullied as the honor of his mother the high purpose of his manhood and the priceless integrity of his soul. He never once lowered his standard, never hesitated or faltered, never cowered or compromised, but stood erect and unafraid

in every hour of trial and demanded the unconditional surrender of the robber systems of chattel and wage slavery.

The beautiful lecture he gave at the opera house at Terre Haute cannot be described in words. The picture of the great abolition orator on the stage that night is vividly preserved in my memory. His commanding figure, clad in conventional black, was one of noble majesty, his florid features eloquent with animation, his every gesture grace itself; he spoke in soft, mellow, musical tones and held his audience breathless to the last word of his masterly discourse, which was as scholarly as it was eloquent, profound and impressive.

After the lecture he was our guest at a quiet little luncheon. He seemed to enjoy the occasion. He chatted with us freely in a most familiar manner. He thanked us graciously for our hospitality and I then accompanied him to his room at the hotel. As the chairman of the lecture committee it fell to me to pay the lecturer his fee. The audience, unfortunately, had not been large and the financial loss was considerable. Mr. Phillips felt this keenly, and it plainly distressed him not a little. "Please take back part of the fee to cover your loss," he said to me in the kindest possible way, when I placed the money in his hands.

"No, Mr. Phillips," said I, "you have earned it, it is yours, and you must keep it. If we had come out ahead you would have accepted no more than your fee and we cannot consent to your accepting less than the stipulated amount." He generously insisted upon handing back part of the money, but it was as persistently declined, and he consented at last, reluctantly, to keep it.*

From time to time Terre Haute had swung from temperance campaigns to woman suffrage crusades. The former enlisted whole cross-sections of the community marching to a general pledge-taking, and then blacksliding en masse. The latter summoned a few venturesome souls

* *Pastels of Men,* Eugene V. Debs, pages 26–30.

who gestured politely in the general direction of enfranchisement. Gene resolved to give Terre Haute a taste of the real thing. He brought Susan B. Anthony to town. When he informed the Occidental Literary Club of his intentions even the most loyal of his followers backed away. Mild proposals for the eventual liberation of the ladies were well enough, but it was a different matter to lend approval to the blunt eloquence of this "female firebrand" from the East.

"All right," said Gene, "I'll handle the matter myself." He hired a hall, met Susan at the railroad station, and walked with her through Main Street to a hotel. Susan's hat was awry. As she bobbed alongside of Gene she sent up a continuous chatter. The street paused to contemplate the pair. Some one laughed the loud, empty laugh of a small-town, street-corner loafer. Gene stopped short, whirled round and strode over to the scoffer. He put his hands on his hips and stood staring at the man. The blue eyes shot fire. There was no more laughter. Neither was there an audience that night. "It would not have required any great amount of egging on to have excited the people to drive her from the community," said Debs. Even Gene's popularity could not melt the hatred of these provincials for the pioneer suffragist. "Even my friends were disgusted with me for piloting such an 'undesirable citizen' into the community," Debs said.

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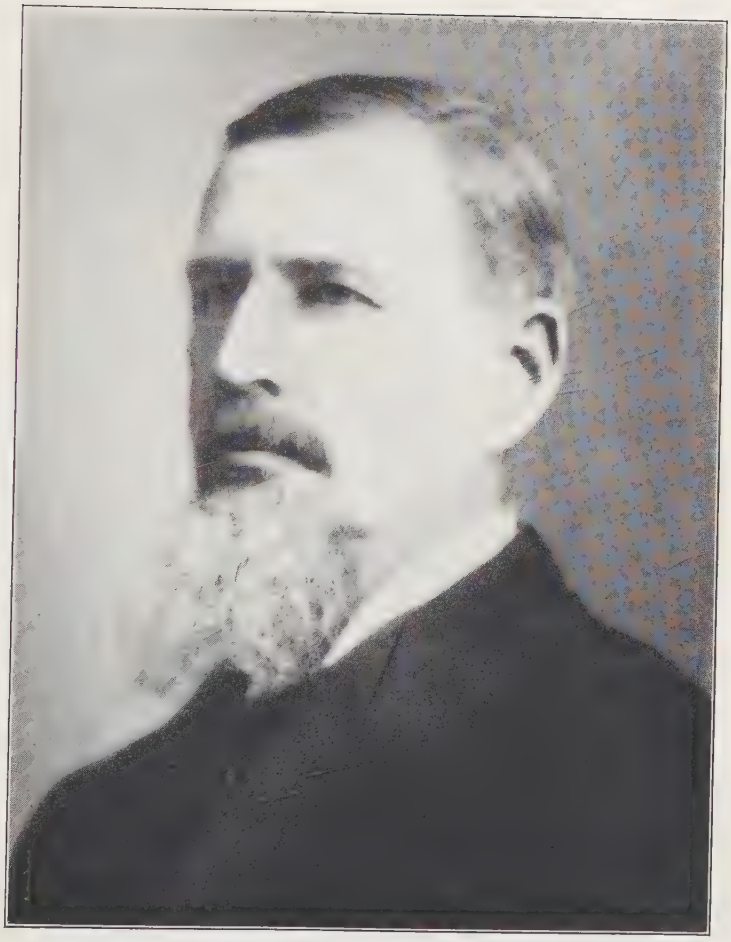
However vehemently the respectables in the hierarchy of the brotherhood might deplore strikes and their attendant violence, the effects of the 1877 uprisings were not to

be "ignored." Writers for Eastern magazines were announcing that labor organizations were definitely done for in America as the result of the resentment of a liberally propagandized public against the railroaders. For a while it seemed that their prediction was coming true, so far at any rate as Vigo Lodge, No. 16, was concerned. A few Sundays after the Indianapolis convention, the secretary read his report to no more than six lodge members. But two or three attended the next meeting, and for several months thereafter Gene was the only one to appear on meeting nights. He opened the hall, sat for an hour alone, staring somberly at empty chairs, and then went back to the Eleventh Street house to fall into one of his bitter moods of extreme depression; depression but not despair. For there was a challenge here, and Gene resolved to meet it.

Little by little he herded the frightened sheep back to the fold. His presence stiffened the backbones of men who were convinced that society had definitely outlawed them because of their membership in trades-unions. Shamefacedly, they assured Gene that they would stick by him. It was more their love for Gene than for the brotherhood that brought the members of the old Vigo through those crucial days. Gene did not exaggerate when he said in his farewell talk to the firemen in 1894 that he and he alone had saved the order from total extermination in Terre Haute.

Word of what the tow-headed protegé of Josh Leach's had done to maintain No. 16 went ahead of Gene to the next convention of the sorely demoralized order which was held at Buffalo in 1878. Gene made a speech intended to reassure the faltering rank and file, and when he came back



GENE'S FATHER, JEAN DANIEL

Pioneer in the "Valley of Democracy."

to Terre Haute he had been chosen assistant editor of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, the official organ of the scoopers. The magazine was two years old when Gene began his editorial duties.

It was a bizarre affair of some twenty-six closely printed pages, on which poems of sentiment jostled grisly records of railway accidents and detailed instructions as to the handling of balky fire boxes. Gene, who had worn a brilliant, striped overcoat and sported a cane at the Buffalo convention, had said in his speech:

> Standing as we do beneath the frown of what society is pleased to call respectable, we can give proof that the locomotive firemen of the United States and Canada are entitled to the same respect and consideration that is so lavishly bestowed upon many other classes of laborers. It is true that we cannot appear in the gilded laces and gaudy garments necessary to put the polish upon the "gentleman" of our day, yet "beneath many a ragged dress there beats a noble heart" and on the same policy, the locomotive firemen of our land are a class of laborers who are not entirely unworthy to receive the respect of society, nor are they destitute of the principles requisite to stamp them as moral and honest citizens. Five years ago the first rays of the brotherhood were faintly discernible in the distance, but from that time until the present moment, the sun of its existence has continued its ascendancy until today its beams of light and intelligence have penetrated the most remote parts of the nation.

His first contributions to the magazine smacked of the same irreproachable respectability which the speech conveyed. The New Year's issue of the magazine contained a gorgeous frontispiece, which showed according to its artist, "a widow with a grateful heart, in the foreground, placing a wreath on the bared head of a kneeling fireman. Beside her stands a child, clothed by the order. In her arms is a

little one, waiting for the active beneficence of the order and above this group shine the soft rays from a locomotive headlight. Emblazoned on banners stretching out from either side of the headlight are the three sacred watchwords of the order: 'Benevolence, Sobriety and Industry.' "

Most of the readers of the magazine thought that this was a pretty grand concoction. Also they were pleased by the high-flown sentiment contained in the poems of Noah W. Parker, which often extended over three pages. Poetry literally poured in upon the editors. Hands calloused by shovel handles, it appeared, turned readily to the production of verse which dripped sweetness and light: *Brave Brakeman Bill, The Knight of the Scoop, The Fireman's Fate, Out of a Job, The Station Agent's Story.* Over these firemen moved their lips in rapture, and their womenfolk gave way to frank tears. Now and then a higher symbolism was achieved.

> Onward moves the Car of Progress;
> Reason throned as Engineer,
> Looks ahead, then pulls the throttle,
> And we greet the coming year.
>
> Time, with can and scoop as Fireman,
> Oils her wheels and feeds her well,
> That each passing year as stations,
> May on Time, her records tell.

Very popular was the "Ladies' Department" of the magazine, wherein one bold feature writer discussing *Reform in Women's Dress* urged "a dualistic form of attire for the lower as well as the upper limbs." In short, trousers.

The light burned late in Gene's bedroom now as the assistant editor labored over editorials exhorting the brothers

to lead more industrious, sober and beneficent lives, and incidentally to pay their dues and show up at meetings. He mailed off fat envelopes crammed with copy to the editor at Dayton, Ohio. And he knew the "first, fine, careless rapture" of a creative artist when the early issues containing his contributions exactly as he had written them out in that clear script of his arrived at the Terre Haute post office. Gene was to write for a hundred-and-one labor papers, to reach a position of eminence in the peculiarly difficult field of labor journalism, but it is safe to say that no latter-day achievement was to give him half the satisfaction which he derived from editing those first issues of the Locomotive Firemen's Magazine.

Desperate as were the affairs of the brotherhood as revealed at the Buffalo Convention, they were to come to worse straits. Steadily a disheartened membership drifted away until there were left only sixty lodges, twelve hundred dues-paying members, and a growing debt. The times were soul-trying for Gene, F. W. Arnold, Grand Master, and the other officials. It was a glum set of men who met at the next convention in Chicago to see what could be done to salvage their sinking craft. The delegates, sensing that something was decidedly wrong, did not yet realize the full extent of the disaster which was being discussed by the officials behind closed doors. They were lulled by the flattering speeches of welcoming city officials. And it was not until outsiders were asked to leave and the convention went into executive session, that the true state of affairs was revealed. The brotherhood was close to bankruptcy. The printers of the magazine were pressing for the collection of their bill. The firemen left Chicago in a state verging on panic.

No hint of this appeared in the pages of the magazine. The convention had gone on solemn record with a resolution stating that "We, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, here assembled in convention, do hereby ignore strikes, and hereafter will settle all differences by arbitration." And in keeping with this ivory-tower policy, Gene wrote:

> In times gone by, laboring men who had been imposed on, formed themselves into a mob and with a recklessness that makes us shudder, began to burn and plunder the property of the corporations they were working for . . . While we always sympathized with these deluded and miserable wretches, we have always felt that they were wrong in acting so violently. There is a different way of adjusting difficulties between the employer and employee. Our organization believes in arbitration. All differences should be settled in this way, for no good has ever or can ever come from resorting to violence and bloodshed.

When the scoopers came together again for their seventh convention the following year, 1880, there were many delegates who felt in their hearts that this would be the last gathering of the organized firemen of the country. The treasury had been looted. One of their high officials had stabbed them in the back. The secretary-treasurer had vanished and with him the remainder of the funds. They were now in debt for more than $6,000. Grand Master Arnold and Samuel Stevens, an active organizer, came into Gene's room and shut the door. They sat down heavily alongside the tall youngster sprawling on the bed. Stevens said, "Gene, you're the only man that can save us now. The boys like you and trust you, and we want you to take the job of secretary-treasurer and editor-in-chief of the magazine. For God's sake pull us out of this hole." Gene

sat up straight. "Boys," he said, "I don't want it." He thought back to Terre Haute and the new pressures that were coming on him there from every side. He did not want leadership of this desperate cause. Even his naturally optimistic nature could see no hope for putting the order on its feet again. And then, when he looked at the drawn faces of the two who were striving to keep the order alive and who were showing such touching confidence in him, Gene's heart took charge of things. It threw overboard all better judgment. When Stevens and Arnold closed the door again, Gene was to all intents and purposes secretary-treasurer and editor-in-chief of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*. For the convention elected him with a whoop, and with the first of those thunderous mass repetitions of "Debs! Debs! Debs!" that were to ring in his ears for a half century to come.

Gene went from room to room, from delegate to delegate on a desperate money-raising hunt. "Stick to us, boys," he said, "and in another year I will guarantee the brotherhood will be out of debt." Back home, he gave his note to secure a printer's bill of $1,800. There were a host of unpaid beneficiary claims. Gene dug up securities for them. He subscribed $60 towards the total indebtedness of the union from his own pocket. His friends told him that he was a fool to attempt this impossible resurrection of the dead. "You'll be robbed, Gene," they said. "The workers aren't worth it." Gene flashed his charming smile on them, and when he was through with his interviews with the leading men of Terre Haute he had their names on a piece of paper. This was a bond for $10,000, a guarantee against any repetition of the vanishing secretary-treasurer trick. The name of Debs' father, (who had dropped the "Jean"

by this time and was now plain "Daniel"), headed the guarantors. And then came such other substantial Terre Hauteans as John G. Heinl, Philip Schloss, T. W. Harper, Robert S. Cox, Crawford Fairbanks, the millionaire brewer, Martin Hollinger and Newton Rogers. Mayor Benjamin F. Havens and President Riley McKeen of the Vandalia, certified that Gene was "reliable and responsible."

Gene's backers were not worrying about his reliability. They knew their man. In the fall of 1879 they had elected Gene City Clerk of Terre Haute. At the time of his nomination on the Democratic ticket, *The Terre Haute Gazette* said:

> For City Clerk the party (The Democratic Party) made a most admirable selection when it named Eugene V. Debs as the standard bearer. Mr. Debs is a finely built young man of twenty-five, is active, hard-working, painstaking and inspired by a most laudable ambition to succeed in all he undertakes. He has a good voice to read the record of the Council and writes a neat, plain hand, with which to keep it. No one could be possessed of better qualifications than he to make not only an acceptable but a first-class clerk . . . Mr. Debs is a rising young man. His habits are excellent, his manners are pleasant, and his qualifications first-class. If he doesn't run away ahead the *Gazette* will badly miss its guess.*

The *Gazette* was right. Gene had run away ahead. He had walked out of Hulman's when he took office in January, 1880, and moved into the City Hall. Gene's employers were sorry to lose him. They wrote a glowing testimony as to the competent manner with which Gene had fulfilled his duties.

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* Issue of May 18, 1879.

> In all business transactions between us, we have found him (Debs) to be honorable and upright—a man of strict honesty and integrity, and devoid of the desire to overreach or take advantage or deal unjustly with others.

They were proud to have a former clerk of theirs in the City Hall. Almost as proud as the lodge members who dropped in on Gene and watched with open-mouthed admiration as he made out records of deeds and other complicated affairs in "a neat, plain hand."

It was these new duties which had made Gene hesitate to take on the burden of reviving the brotherhood. But now that he had given his word he put all hesitation aside. He turned the room in the ell of the Eleventh Street house into the editorial offices of the magazine. He packed his bag, flung it under his desk and whenever there was a let-up in the City Clerk's office, a chance to go out at night during the week or to make a more extended week-end trip, Gene was on the road.

It was doing all over again the job Josh Leach had started seven years before. Gene found that of the sixty lodges left more than one-half existed only on the official roster. Of the remainder not more than twenty were actively functioning. He wrote to all the old-timers begging them to get a crowd together and let him come and talk to them. He sweated over letters to every active spirit still left in the brotherhood from the Buffalo yards to Denver. In his editorials he wrote with confidence of "the speedy revival of the brotherhood." Never could a reader guess that on the broad shoulders of a young man of twenty-five, looking up from a desk in Terre Haute to see the gray fingers of dawn at his window, rested the job of reorganizing the firemen of the country.

We have it from Gene himself: "I worked that year as I never worked before—it was slavery. For six years I knew no Sunday. I used my salary as City Clerk. I worked one year for nothing and paid out $800 [his salary as City Clerk was $1500] for the Brotherhood." *

He obtained a short leave of absence from the City Hall and went east.

> My grip was always packed, and I was darting in all directions. To tramp through a railroad yard in the rain, snow or sleet half the night, or till daybreak, or to be ordered out of the roundhouse for being an "agitator," or put off a train, sometimes passenger, more often freight, while attempting to deadhead over the division, were all in the program, and served to whet the appetite to conquer.
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> One night in mid-winter at Elmira, N. Y., a conductor on the Erie kindly dropped me off in a snowbank, and as I clambered to the top I ran into the arms of a policeman, who heard my story and on the spot became my friend.
>
> I rode on the engines over mountain and plain, slept in the cabooses and bunks and was fed from their pails by the swarthy stokers who still nestle close to my heart, and will until it is cold and still.
>
> . . . And so I was spurred on in the work of organizing, not the firemen merely, but the brakemen, switchmen, telegraphers, shop men, track-hands, all of them in fact, and as I had now become known as an organizer, the calls came from all sides and there are but few trades I have not helped to organize and less still in whose strikes I have not at some time had a hand.†

At the end of that year there were signs of a reviving interest in the brotherhood. Attendance at lodge meetings

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* Speech delivered at B. L. F. convention, 1895.

† *Debs, His Authorized Life and Letters,* David Karsner, page 121.

was increasing, here and there backsliders were paying up their dues. In the nation, hard times were coming to an end with the resumption of specie payments. The railroads were shaking off the effects of the prolonged panic. In 1877 their total mileage had been 79,089. In 1880 they stepped this up to 92,000. Bessemer gave them steel rails in place of the "iron streaks." Locomotives and cars put on weight, and to carry them it was necessary to lay sturdier roadbeds. The idea of railroad systems was born. The gaps between the short lines running across the continent were filled in. Gauges were unified. The technique of rail consolidation (there were 1,500 separate railway lines in 1880) was being studied.

The workers, with three meals under their belts, took courage. They went back to their unions; they formed new ones. The farmers still bent on revenge, turned to politics and polled respectably large protest votes. While James A. Garfield went gracefully to his election and the assassin bullet of Guiteau on no more liberal a platform than support of "the Grand Old Party that had saved the Union and freed the slave," throughout the farms and among the middle classes in the cities there was a stirring.

Gene made the most of this new-found courage. He had learned now those words which clicked with men's imaginations. He paced nervously across the length of platforms in small-town meeting-halls on Sunday afternoons, slamming one lean hand against the other, shooting out a long forefinger, bending with an easy grace which his days before the furnace had taught him, to look into the upturned faces on the front rows. He cajoled, pleaded, exhorted for his cause with evangel fire. He gave his audiences confidence and renewed their hopes. They looked at him and

saw in that tall figure some one they could follow. They came up from their seats to tell Gene they were with him, first the "old heads," a bit ashamed of their desertion and then the younger men, fumbling their caps and muttering something about "wantin' in." Word of Gene's progress reached his fellow-officials at headquarters doing staff duty there. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen was coming back, by God. Gene Debs of Terre Haute was turning the trick.

The magazine reflected the new spirit of its readers. Little by little general articles were eliminated and in their place appeared features of immediate concern to men on the job. There appeared descriptions of the new locomotives rolling out of the Baldwin shops in Philadelphia, discussion of prospects for the elimination of grade-crossings, analysis of union policy and the duties of members. The quality of the verse improved though its quantity was as large as ever. In the issue for January, 1881, appeared the following, signed "J. W. Riley" and called, *Old Fashioned Roses:—*

> There ain't no style about 'em
> And they're sort o' pale and faded:
> Yit the doorway here, without 'em
> Would be lonesomer and shaded
> With a good 'eal blacker shadder
> Than the mornin'-glories makes
> And the sunshine would look sadder for
> their good old-fashioned sakes.

The editor was evidently resolved to give his readers the output of his reporter friend in Indianapolis and make them like it.

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The end of the first round of one of the most brilliant fights for organization in the labor history of America found Gene groggy on his feet but with his head still up. He looked ten years older than his age. He was sleeping a short four hours, and fitfully at that. His work was driving him. He could not seem to get on top of it no matter how desperately he strove.

He unearthed aid in his own home. He took his sisters Emily and Eugenia into the office. Theodore, who had been making bundles of the magazines and directing wrappers, was elevated to the position of secretary to the secretary.

Sixteen-year-old Theodore Debs, looked up to the heights on which his brother trod, with the adoring eyes of a hero worshipper. For the rest of his life he was to stand in the lengthening shadow of Gene's fame. And for more than forty years, when Gene felt the need of long-visioned counsel, undying devotion, a service sacrificial, tender, selfless, he turned to Theodore. Never did a Damon love a Pythias more deeply than these two loved each other. The unassuming, sweet-tempered Theodore, perfectly willing to march into the fires of any hell for Gene's sake, was the ideal foil for Gene's more volatile temperament. A few drawled words from Theodore, "I don't like the looks of that man, Gene," "Let's try it this way," "How about writing an article on that?"—and Gene would stop short on some headlong course and say quietly, "You're right, Theodore. By God, you've got that right."

Today Theodore, in his Terre Haute home, still lives in the presence of his beloved Gene. All about him are re-

minders of the lost brother. Pictures of Gene on the wall, Gene's scrapbooks, programs of the Occidental Literary Club, a case full of presents given Gene by his admirers. A colorful and forceful personality, with a charm all his own, it is the memories of the days with Gene which most closely touch Theodore now. Fiercely he resents even the mildest criticism of Gene's tactics or a hint that his brother might have done differently in certain situations. Nor is this a throwback to the hero-worshipping boy in the Terre Haute home. Theodore knows well enough that Gene was no haloed saint. It is the downright, old-fashioned loyalty of one great-hearted man towards another, rare and very touching in a time when it is the fashion, among radicals at any rate, to bury emotion beneath hard surfaces.

With Theodore and the two girls in the office, Gene was relieved of the most onerous paper work. He had worked a year for nothing and from his own pocket had paid out $800. The brotherhood was now able to pay him $1,500 from the dues that were coming in. From this he paid out $1,300 to keep the office going. Still for one whom *The Cincinnati Gazette* of December 6, 1880, described as "a young man of high position in society, one of the most honorable and intelligent of men, active and energetic," the financial rewards for being all that, were not magnificent.

In the May election of 1881 Gene polled 2,460 votes and was re-elected city clerk over J. W. Barnett, his Republican opponent, who received 2,222 votes. It was a normal Republican year. Terre Haute thought more of Gene than his party.

At this time, when the "money question," already entering the political mind of the West, posed itself in grim earnest before Gene, he was visited by Major O. J. Smith,

a veteran Greenbacker who had had his eye on Gene for some time. The Major was then engaged in promoting the American Press Association, the organization which was to supply "boiler-plate" to small-town papers. He had solid financial backing. He wanted Gene to be general manager of the enterprise. The prospects he held out were rosy. The salary was three times that Gene was getting as City Clerk. Gene courteously turned down the job. Surprised, the Major insisted on Gene's going to Chicago to look over the new A. P. A. plant. Gene journeyed to Chicago at the company's expense, had a glimpse at a vista where one went in carriages, and waxed fat. He said to Smith: "I'm sorry to have to turn this down, but I'm for the working people."

And then the Major repeated the formula, so familiar to every young American laborite: "Gene, you can't do anything for the working people. They will only turn and stab you in the back. But, if you're in earnest about this, come along with us and make yourself some good money and then you can go back to your blessed workers."

Gene sighed, looked down at the Major, who was to die a millionaire, and thanked him politely. He could not take the job. It was hard to explain his reasons. But he could not take the job. It was a perplexed promoter who watched the tall young labor organizer go stooping through the office door.

Gene went back to his desk to edit an article of Ingersoll's denouncing alcohol, to print a poem of Robert Burns's in place of the usual *Fireman's Lament*, to ponder the contributions to the "humorous" department:—

> A Peoria woman sneezed her jaw out of place lately and the married men of Peoria have been buying snuff ever since.

Q. What do you think of the scenery?
A. I never saw a prettier Gainsborough hat in my life.

An Irishman watching a game of baseball was sent to the grass by a foul which struck him under the fifth rib. "A fowl was ut? Begorra, I thought it was a mule!"

Under the heading, *A Glance at Human Knowledge,* there began, for the edification and uplift of the scoopers, what is probably the pioneer of the "outline" literature. The plan was that followed by the outliners of today. It was simply to present the sum total of all human knowledge in a series of popularly written magazine articles which any wayfaring man might read and digest at his leisure. It proved a bit too ambitious, even for Gene, and after a few issues it was abandoned.

The firemen who met in Paine Memorial Hall in Boston in 1881 learned to their huge delight that they now had 3,000 members, 90 lodges, and a circulation of 4,800 for their magazine. Gene was re-elected by a convention rising and cheering his name. Every one crowded up to Gene for hand-shaking and back-slapping. He filled a notebook with engagements to speak.

He was being recognized as the ablest of all the Western spokesmen for the workers whenever "the labor question" was to be discussed. The enthusiasm for Gene outran all considerations of mercy. Men took it for granted that his time was at the disposal of any group of awakening workers, and they were obdurate in their demands. Mass aggressions upon any chance he might have had to lead his own life were well under way.

The crowds claimed him. If, as the intellectuals tell us, Gene was "a hopeless extrovert," it must be remembered

that a day which consists of working at a clerical job from nine to six, bolting down a hasty supper, dashing off to a lodge meeting and returning to the writing of editorials until 3 A. M. does not lend itself to leisured introspection. And that tempo, already set at twenty-five, was to increase its pace through the years. As a matter of fact, it is probably true that the "extrovert" analysis comes from a too hasty glance at a figure always on the move. There is plenty of evidence that there was a brooding, mystic quality about Gene. He was not unacquainted with the inner life of the spirit.

4

Once the fight for mere existence seemed won, the struggle for status had to be renewed. That elusive maid, Public Opinion, must be sedulously wooed. The smouldering hostility of the railroad managers must be damped down until the brotherhood grew stronger. Finally the union firemen must achieve a full measure of respect for themselves and their organization.

Gene had a chance to teach this last lesson to an officer of the brotherhood through direct and forceful example. The man arrived at Gene's office sore, humiliated and scared. His story was that he had gone to a vice president of the Pennsylvania at Columbus and had plucked up enough courage to suggest that the railroad supply him with a pass over its lines. He had pointed out that officials of the brotherhood were compelled, because of the lack of money in the treasury, to beat their way on cabooses and in the cabs of friendly engineers. This was not a dignified method of transportation and would the vice president please give him a pass?

Much to his surprise, the vice president had heaved his 200 pounds from behind the desk, marched around to the brotherhood man, lifted him by the scruff of the neck and thrown him out of the office like any tramp. That was bad enough in itself, but to make matters worse the "white-collar boys" in the outer office had laughed long and loudly over his discomfiture.

Gene, who never would have dreamed of asking a favor from a railroad official, listened to this pitiful snuffling with disgust and a rising anger. His eyes snapped, his mouth straightened into a flaming, ugly line.

"Get your hat," he said to his colleague. "You and I are going to Columbus."

"But, Gene, he's a tough one—two hundred pounds; hands like a ham; fishy eyes; scares you just to look at him. . . ."

"Oh, come on," said Gene, and the two swung aboard a freight whose crew hailed Gene with delight.

The clerks looked up expectantly as Gene, with the unhappy brotherhood man at his heels, followed the office boy into the foreboding presence of the vice president. "Wait until the old man gets into action. He'll chuck that beanpole out as fast as he did the other feller," said the white-collars gleefully.

Said the vice president, spacing his words with icy precision:

"Before we go any further, I want you to know, Debs, that I don't give a God damn for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen."

Said Debs, leaning over the desk and levelling a quivering forefinger straight at the fishy eyes:

"And I want you to know that I don't give a God damn

(Courtesy of Frank X. Holl)

GENE, THE ORGANIZER OF THE RAILROADERS

for the Pennsylvania Railroad. I'm not here to get your opinion of us. I'm here to get courteous treatment for our officials."

The vice president leaned back, pulled at his square-cut beard and stared at Gene.

"How did you get here?" he asked.

"That's none of your damned business," snapped Gene. "You'd be only too glad to fire the crew that brought us in. Now I understood that you threw this gentleman out of your office. . . ."

They were both full-lunged men. For an hour they unburdened themselves of their respective views on the subject of trades-unions in voices which thundered round the ears of the astonished clerks beyond the closed doors. The statement made later by the awed brotherhood official to the effect that "when they got going good you could hear 'em clear across Franklin County" has no basis in fact. It is true, however, that they were articulate.

Gene, it seemed, completely forgot that he represented a highly respectable organization, abjuring all militancy and seeking only to live at peace with the management. And the vice president likewise forgot that management's first interest was in the welfare of its loyal employees.

At the end of an hour of volley-firing from both sides there was a sudden lull. During it the vice president summoned a clerk, gazing at Gene with a strange expression the while.

"Then I thought to myself," the brotherhood official told a group of eager listeners back at union headquarters, "that the jig was up. 'He's going to have some flunkey chuck us out,' I thought. But what the hell do you think? In comes a white collar shaking in his boots, and the bearded

—— —— says to him 'Give these *gentlemen*' (get that? Gentlemen!) 'two annual passes good over the main line and all branches.' And then Gene without batting an eye says, 'Thanks just the same. But I don't want an annual for myself. You can make mine a trip pass if you will.' And the —— —— leans back and looks funny over at Gene and says, 'You ought to be working for us. You could make money working for us.' And Gene says in a queer voice, 'Thanks. I've heard something like that before. I like what I'm doing.' And a minute later him and me were walking out of the office with passes in our pockets, and all the little pasty-faced clerks looking after us like they saw a couple of ghosts."

This story, with many embellishments, was soon being retailed in the yards, in bunk-houses, wherever the railroaders made shrewd estimates of the calibre of their officials. There was a lift in the thought that you had for leader a man who could walk in and tell one of the toughest labor-baiters in the country just where he got off. Far more effective than a dozen convention resolutions, a score of editorials demanding that the labor unions be recognized as an integral part of the rapidly expanding industrial empire of the '80's, was this give-and-take interview between Gene and the vice president.

CHAPTER VI

RESPECTABILITY AND POLITICS

WHEREVER he went those days, in switch shanties in the East, through the river towns along the Mississippi or in the lodge rooms further west, Gene ran across the trail of the mysterious order, known to the public only as "The Knights" and rumored to be an underground organization dominating the most important figures in the labor world.

Gene never had any love for secrecy. "I have a way," he said once, "of speaking out a transcript of my mind." The Knights seemed to be good enough labor men. They had done yeomen service in 1877. But why all this mystery?

Similar questions on the part of other labor men evidently decided the leaders of the Knights to come aboveground. Then, too, since the "Molly Maguires," * secret orders among the workers were everywhere suspect. At all events, at a general assembly of the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, held in 1881, the veil was lifted, revealing nothing more alarming than the somewhat perplexed countenance of Terence V. Powderly, the blonde man of the mustaches and the nose cold. He was Grand

* "The Molly Maguires" was a secret society formed among the anthracite miners of Pennsylvania in the early sixties. Its members resorted to violence against the mine bosses. In 1876, following an exposure of the society's tactics by James McParlan, a Pinkerton detective, fourteen Mollies were sent to prison and ten were hanged.—Author's note.

Master Workman of the Knights. He was a member of the Socialist Labor Party and was Mayor of Scranton, Pa.

Gene, in several editorials, welcomes the unveiling of the Knights. While evidently the personality and philosophy of their leader puzzled him, as indeed it was to puzzle every intelligent laborite for a decade to come, he generally approved the idealistic tone of the preamble to the constitution of the Knights, lifted, as we have seen, from the now defunct industrial brotherhood. The preamble announced that it was the mission of the Knights:

> To bring within the folds of organization every department of productive industry, making knowledge a standpoint for action, and industrial, moral worth, not wealth, the true standard of individual and national greatness.
>
> Second. To secure to the toilers a proper share of the wealth that they create; more of the leisure that rightfully belongs to them; more societary advantages; more of the benefits, privileges and emoluments of the world; in a word, all those rights and privileges necessary to make them capable of enjoying, appreciating, defending and perpetuating the blessings of good government.*

Powderly's economic inheritance was an odd mixture of piety and pioneering. Uriah Stephens, who, with eight other garment cutters, founded the noble order in Philadelphia in 1869, was a devout, gallant and rather naïve Christian, all for the "dignity of labor." He held that the object of the order was to be:

> . . . the complete emancipation of the wealth producers from the thralldom and loss of wage slavery; the entire redemption of the world's toilers from the political tyranny of un-

* *Thirty Years of Labor*, Terence V. Powderly, page 257.

just laws, and the annihilation of the great anti-Christ of civilization manifest in the idolatry of wealth, and the consequent degradation and social ostracism of all else not possessing it, and its baneful effects upon heaven ordained labor.*

To fill this large order, Stephens proceeded to organize the workers in the garment trades into district assemblies. Soon "sojourners" from other trades were allowed to join the Knights and when these sojourners "swarmed" (to use the bee-language of the Knights) and started their own organizations in their own industries, a large-scale national movement of laboring men was under way. It was Stephens's idea to set up a labor organization "as broad as the American human family to include white and black, man and woman, skilled and unskilled, proletarian and intellectual, worker and farmer, all—with the exception of a very few, the banker, the broker, the lawyer, the gambler and the liquor dealer." †

At the beginning, the very fact that the Knights was a secret organization appealed to the American masquerading passion. Coal-diggers, switchmen and garment cutters meeting fellow Knights pulled up their sleeves on their right arms and murmured "Are you a worker?" Slyly, the one accosted gripped his lapel and answered "I am a worker." Notices of meetings were sent out under the mystic symbol "xxxxx." The secret work of the organization was called "Adelphon Kruptos," and many an honest brakeman sat up until all hours conning his part in an approaching initiation.

The renewed activities of the Pinkertons, after the scaf-

* *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States,* Nathan Fine, page 118.

† Ibid, page 118–119.

folds had been put up for the Molly Maguires in Schuylkill County, the possibility of disruption of the entire order through treachery or *agents provocateur* and finally the increasing demands of the rank and file for open action on the political field, put an end to the mumbo-jumbo of "Adelphon Kruptos." The day for secret labor organizations was at an end. Gene in Terre Haute hailed its departure.

With the voluntary unmasking of the Knights rose the need for some definite statement to the public of their *raison d'etre* and this Powderly supplied with the following:

> The rights of the common everyday laborer were to be considered by the new order, because the members of trades-unions had failed to see that they had rights.

And to win these rights? As Powderly saw it, they were to be had only by a combined frontal attack upon "the contraction of the currency, the monopoly of land and the placing of the railroad king upon an altar before which millions must worship or become tramps." At this time it was the question of land which most fired Powderly's roving imagination. Later it was to be temperance or a labor bureau or money or the eight-hour day or the co-operatives; whatever the economic spotlight of the moment picked out. "The eight-hour law, the prohibition of child labor . . . all are of weighty moment to the toiler. But high above them all stands the land question. Give me the land and you may frame as many eight-hour laws as you please."

Here was a philosophy born of the pioneering exigencies of the disappearance of public lands, with its eye upon a mistily liberal goal rather than anything directly touching

the immediate on-the-job demands of the wageworkers. In it trades-unions were well in the background. Indeed, Powderly, whose egotism was enormous and who petulantly chided his rank and file when they failed to follow official mandates, complained bitterly over the fact that time was "wasted" by the convening Knights over such "secondary matters" as strikes and their tactics.

Whether he liked it or not, whether or not it was true as a district master workman reported: "In fact, there seems to be a general ignorance, or disregard of the principles of our organization. The older ideas of former trade organizations seem to predominate and control the actions of the locals generally." Powderly was soon to find himself at the head of the only considerable national labor organization in America, conducting strikes against the captains and the kings of industry, sallying into the political field and moving gradually leftwards. From the time that he was shoved headfirst by his insistent membership into the telegraphers' strike of 1883, until at length Gompers brought him to his knees, Powderly played the rôle of an unhappy warrior, struggling confusedly on battlefields which he had not sought, with weapons not of his choosing.

The invaluable contribution of the Knights to the thinking of alert laborites, such as Gene Debs, was the underscoring of the plight of the unskilled workers. Powderly and his followers, at one time as many as 700,000, made the first attempt to breach the Chinese Wall which sheltered the skilled workers and kept them in contemptuous isolation, apart from the rest of the labor world.

Gene's democratic instincts thrilled to the knightly call to all workers irrespective of skill, color or sex. He expressed his enthusiasm for this part of the Knights' program, while

expressing his astonishment over Powderly's evident reluctance to apply it to trades-unionism in action.

For his part, Gene was finding time to speak at meetings of brakemen, switchmen, shopmen, maintenance-of-way men urging the organization of these submerged crafts on whom the engineers and even some of the firemen looked down with such condescension from their cab windows. He hailed, with whole-souled delight, the organization of the brakemen in 1883 and was a leading spirit in the switchmen's union which was to come later.

In Terre Haute, workers in every industry in town came to Gene for advice. Commenting on his easy re-election as city clerk, *The American Railroader* said: "He was simply invulnerable. Wealthy men, property holders, etc., voted for him because they felt sure their interests would be safe in his keeping: and the laboring classes and the poor supported him because they knew he was their friend and practically one of them."

When the street-car men of Terre Haute wanted higher wages, their leaders came to Gene, at work on an article on arbitration as the best means for averting strikes. Gene suggested that the aggrieved workers attempt to persuade the management to set up an arbitration committee. After much bickering, a committee of five was finally chosen with two representatives of the company, two workers and Gene as the fifth member. Finally, a settlement favorable to the men was agreed upon and Gene was delegated to write it out. As he drew up the papers to be jointly signed, he began to worry at signs of weakening which he had noticed on the part of the company's president.

"Take this right over to the president," he commanded a car-driver, elated at the outcome of the affair, "and tell

him we must have his signature immediately. Now remember, be courteous but firm."

The man went out of Gene's office like a shot, and in a short time was back with the required signature.

As Gene and Theodore were locking up their office, satisfied that they had done a good day's work, they were confronted by the president. He was in a towering rage. He had been insulted right in front of his board of directors, made a fool of, by God, by a common car-driver and what was Gene going to do about it?

Gene sent for his courier, did his best to calm the ruffled official and finally got the story. The driver, waving the papers, made out in Gene's "neat, plain hand," had burst into a directors' meeting at which the president was explaining the terms of settlement. With not so much as a word of apology, the driver slapped the papers under the president's nose and shouted: "Gene Debs says for you to sign on that there line and be God damn quick about it." Before the president had time to recover, he had signed the document.

Gene turned to his impetuous lieutenant and said:

"What did I tell you when I gave you these papers?"

"You said to be courteous but firm, Gene, and I done just what you said."

The eyes of Gene and the president met. Both men laughed. The wages of the street-car men of Terre Haute were raised, and the next morning every driver on the line waved a fraternal greeting at the tall figure of their hero on his way to the city hall.

The ninth convention of the firemen was a long and loud laudation of one man—Eugene Victor Debs. To honor him, Terre Haute was selected as the meeting-place

and Terre Haute, basking in the reflection of its city clerk's glory, did itself proud. There was a somewhat straggling procession with bands and Gene and Grand Master Arnold marching up in front, and then the delegates in their Sunday go-to-meetings, and the Occidental Literary Club in red sashes and trick hats, and the Terre Haute Fire Brigade, and the Local Grand Army Post and all. Old Dan Voorhees, now Senator Voorhees, turned on his oratorial best and the mayor made a grand speech of welcome saying how proud Terre Haute was to have a local product like our distinguished citizen, Eugene Victor Debs. At which the convention bellowed approval.

But they saved their loudest cheers for the conclusion of the secretary-treasurer's report announcing that the brotherhood had 121 active lodges, 5,000 members and a steadily diminishing debt. "Debs! Debs! Debs!"—they yelled that name while Gene tried to wave them into silence and the chairman banged his gavel in vain.

Democratic politicians, some of whom had come down from Indianapolis just to "look over this man Debs," put their heads together after that convention and began to talk of running Gene for the State legislature. The firemen's convention of the following year, which again turned into an ovation for Gene, confirmed them in the rightness of their decision. Debs was getting too big for the city clerk job. They would elect him to the legislature and then Congress and then . . .

At the 1883 convention held in Denver, Henry Ward Beecher spoke, but the applause which greeted even this famous orator was feeble compared with the explosion which broke when Gene rose to give his report. A short three years had passed since that dark day when Arnold and

Stephens had come to Gene's room, and now the Brotherhood was out of debt. It could boast 181 lodges, 8,000 members and a first-rate labor paper with a circulation close to 15,000. Small wonder the delegates cheered and cheered again.

Not only in the bread-and-butter matter of organization but in the interpretation of labor and libertarian philosophy was Gene acknowledged leader. Under his editorship the *Firemen's Magazine* was far and away the best union publication of its times. Its columns were open to more than the routine reporting of conventions, wage negotiations and lodge gossip, the desolating contents of most labor organs. W. H. Stuart contributed *What is Socialism?* Gene, reviewing Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, was one of the first in the labor movement of the West to grasp the implications of that dynamic book whose author was rallying to his banners the New York workers in the amazing mayoralty campaign of 1886. The writings of Lawrence Gronlund on Socialism were familiar to Gene.

Over Gene's desk flowed a stream of labor and radical publications: Joseph Buchanan's *Labor Enquirer* from Denver, the anarchist *Verbote* from Chicago, the *Journal of United Labor* from Philadelphia, the Socialist *Labor Review* from Chicago, from New York the paper which Gene reached for first of all, *John Swinton's Paper*, edited by that courageous journalist who, in his last days, was to stand so stanchly by Gene. All these and more were pored over by Gene on the lookout for subjects for his editorial leaders.

Of keenest interest to this ardent federationist, was the news of the birth of the American Federation of Labor. Samuel Gompers and Adolph Strasser of the cigar makers,

P. J. McGuire of the carpenters, Chris Evans of the miners, and other leaders of trades-unionists whose dominating concern was with the organization of skilled workers, and them alone, succeeded in inflating a squabble over union labels, between the leaders of the Knights and the officials of the cigar-makers' union to the dimensions of a controversy of first magnitude. Gompers had maneuvered Powderly into an open line-up with a New York group within the Knights, suspicious of Gompers's "pure and simple" unionism and determined to exclude the cigar makers from the inner councils of the Knights. Ironically enough, the convention which marked the peak of the growth of the Knights when 658 delegates representing a membership of 700,000 workers met at Richmond, Va., in 1886, saw the beginning of its swift decay. By the middle of the following year the membership had shrunk to 510,351. Trades-unionists by thousands saw in the Gompers formula—"the trades-unions pure and simple are the natural organizations of the wage-workers to secure their present material and practical improvement and to achieve their final emancipation"—more immediate profit for themselves than in the sprawling and inchoate political uplift program of Powderly.

Gompers took his "pure and simplers" to Columbus in December, 1886, and there was born the American Federation of Labor. The east side cigar maker was elected president. He held that job with the exception of one year, until his death in 1924.

Gene, watched all this internecine scuffling with distress. He could see good in both camps. The idealism of the Knights appealed to him. And so did the "practical improvement" phrase of Gompers. He wrote an editorial urg-

ing Powderly and Gompers to get together. But Gompers was taking no advice those days. He knew where he was going and he put down that huge head of his and butted, bison-like, towards his goal. Powderly, still a bit bewildered, drifted hazily along talking "free land," money, labor bureaus, etc. Eventually he was to end up in the shelter of a soft government job, pulling meditatively at his graying mustaches, very proud of his authorship of the dullest history of labor ever penned, something of an achievement when one considers the fierce competition in that field.

In the spring of 1884 Gene was nominated for the State Legislature on the Democratic ticket and in the November election he won an easy victory.

In this year he was paying marked attention to Kate Metzel. She was golden-haired with a warm, glowing beauty. Two years younger than Gene, she had come with her mother and step-father, John Jacob Baur, to Terre Haute in 1866. Her father, August Metzel, and her mother, Katherine Steuber, were both German born, both well-to-do, middle-class people. The Metzel and Steuber families settled in Louisville, Kentucky, and there Kate's parents were married in 1854. She was born in Pittsburgh while her parents were on a visit to that city. But the background of her childhood was a Southern one. Her father died in 1859, and in 1865 Mrs. Metzel married Baur. When the family came to Terre Haute, Baur set up a drug store at Eighth Street and Wabash Avenue, and prospered there and when Kate and Gene first met she was living in a residential district six blocks away from Gene's home, but continents apart from his concerns with railroaders, streetcar men and mechanics.

For Kate, as for all her people, these workers had the vaguest existence. Her interest was in music, romantic literature. She had a sound Teutonic training in household affairs. There were plenty of young, middle-class Terre Hauteans filling chairs in the front parlor of the Baur home, when Gene with strange and eager words of a world alien to all of Katherine's interests, arrived on the scene. To be sure, they could talk music and the new novels, and they had a common interest in the theatre. But when it came to economics, with which Gene's head was so filled, it was monologue, not conversation.

There is a story that on the first night when Gene met Katherine at the home of one of his married sisters, he had to dash off to a political meeting the minute supper was over. That he returned within an hour, is evidence enough of the impression which Katherine made upon him. It was a matter of comment, in fact, among the other girls present, who marvelled openly at any feminine magnetism which could draw Gene Debs away from a meeting. Among the girls of Terre Haute, Gene's preoccupation with "stupid politics" was notorious.

Soon Gene was passionately in love. It was his first love affair, and his last, and it lasted until Gene's death. Katherine is quoted as saying: "There was a simple sturdy candidness, a fire and passion, a clarity of mind and singleness of purpose about this young labor agitator that was new and fascinating to me. . . ." *

Gene's courtship was headlong. Within a short time the two were engaged. On the night of Gene's election to the Legislature in November, it was a very proud girl indeed

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* *The National Rip-Saw,* November, 1921.

(Courtesy of Frank X. Holl)

KATHERINE M. DEBS

The Wife of the Young Organizer

who listened in the Baur parlor to the victorious candidate's plans for their future.

He rode up to Indianapolis to be sworn in at the Capitol on the first day of the year 1885. He was thirty years old. He carried himself with assurance. Men came into the smoker and listened respectfully to his opinions on local politics, the labor question, the future of the Democratic Party. He talked eagerly about the chances for putting through a bill for the protection of railway workers. He was keen for that. He had the draft of one in his pocket, and he was hopeful of getting it passed. P. M. Arthur, of the Engineers, had said that the remedy for the ills affecting the workers was at the ballot box. The Democratic Party might do a lot for the workers.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD-BYE TO THE BROTHERHOODS

AS GENE sat in a furnished room in an Indianapolis boarding-house going over the details of his railway employees' liability bill, word came that the wages of the shopmen of the Wabash road had been cut ten per cent, and that the shopmen on the Wabash and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, where a similar cut had gone into effect the year before, had walked out.

He noted with approval that in this strike the engineers, firemen and brakemen stood by the rebellious shopmen. The name of Joseph R. Buchanan, a member of the General Executive Committee of the Knights of Labor and Editor of the *Labor Enquirer* of Denver was featured in the newspaper reports as leader of the strike. Buchanan was a fiery agitator, the direct antithesis to his chief, the refined and finicky Powderly. His bull-like voice which he raised at every labor gathering, won him the title of the "Rip-roarer of the Rockies." He went about through Western mining camps and among the railroaders urging upon the workers the adoption of a slogan of the Knights, "an injury to one is the concern of all." And he took to heart another Knightly command, "Agitate, Educate, Organize." "I was foolish enough," he says, "to think I could blow a blast that would rouse the sleeping giant of labor." * He

* *The Story of a Labor Agitator,* Joseph R. Buchanan, page 88.

did succeed in throwing a scare into the greatest "manipulative mind" of his times, Jay Gould, who had a dominating interest in the two struck roads. For Buchanan took the Wabash strike over onto a third Gould road, the Missouri Pacific, and operated with such speed that within a few days the wage cut was withdrawn.

It was the third and most important victory won for the railway workers by the Knights within a brief period. Buchanan consolidated his gains by organizing district assemblies of railroaders all through the West. "Such as a rule was the method of procedure characteristic of large numbers of the wage-earners at this time. They struck first and joined the Knights of Labor afterwards." *

Gene was warmed by the stories of Buchanan's success. The cold eyes of P. M. Arthur (who had urged his engineers to keep out of the clash with Gould) gazed disapprovingly on the accounts of such rough and ready methods as those of the "Rip-roarer."

Arthur had but recently issued a pronunciamento to the effect that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was purely a benevolent organization. It was not a labor union in the accepted sense of those words. It "ignored" strikes.

Buchanan and the Western militants laughed rudely at Arthur's respectable aloofness and went right ahead agitating, educating and organizing every cross section of the railroad workers, irrespective of their particular crafts.

Aroused by the rush of his men into the district assemblies, Gould resolved to break this pestiferous organization in its infancy. He had lost one strike to be sure, but he had beaten the telegraphers into submission before the Wabash

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* *History of Labor in the United States,* John R. Commons, page 368.

affair, and now he set out to snipe active members of the Knights. One leader after another was fired. In August, Gould chose to do battle in the open by reducing the force of Wabash shopmen at Moberly, Mo., to the bone. Immediately the confident Knights met this move by issuing a general order to all assemblies on the Union Pacific and Gould's Southwestern system to refuse to repair or handle Wabash rolling stock.

Buchanan came roaring east breathing threats of a general strike of all railroaders, picked up Powderly and three other members of the executive board of the Knights, and went pounding into the presence of the owner of the "manipulative mind." Gould wilted at the thought of a general strike. He had no desire to start the "uprisings of 1877" all over again.

Buchanan says that Gould took him over to a corner of the conference room and said:

"Yes, I believe the organization of labor is good for the employees, the employers and the public. I would be pleased if all the employees of the roads in which I am interested were members of organizations of their respective branches of the business. I can meet and treat with the authorized representatives of the men and thus frequently avoid serious trouble; but it is not possible to be always sure of the grievances and wishes of thousands who are distributed through several states and who do not themselves know each other's wishes." *

Gould's surrender was the high-water mark of the rise of the Knights. The prestige of the organization brought in the workers pell-mell. Reluctantly Powderly was forced

* A year later Gould was calling for militia to shoot strikers.—Author's note.

to admit that militancy might have its uses. But in his heart he yearned for a return to the fascinating discussion of such matters as currency reform, the land question and temperance.

Now the Knights were front-page news. Any up-and-coming organization which could tackle and throw Jay Gould twice in succession was something to be examined. The *New York Sun* sent out an inquiring reporter. He returned with the following:

> Five men in this country control the chief interests of five hundred thousand workingmen, and can at any moment take the means of livelihood from two and a half millions of souls. These men compose the executive board of the noble order of the Knights of Labor of America. The ability of the President and cabinet to turn out all the men in the civil service and to shift from one post to another the duties of the men in the army and navy, is a petty authority compared with that of these five Knights. The authority of the late Cardinal was, and that of the Bishops of the Methodist Church is, narrow and prescribed, so far as material affairs are concerned, in comparison with that of these five rulers.
>
> They can stay the nimble touch of almost every telegraph operator; can shut up most of the mills and factories, and can disable the railroads. They can issue an edict against any manufactured goods so as to make their subjects cease buying them, and the tradesmen stop selling them.
>
> They can array labor against capital, putting labor on the offensive or the defensive, for quiet and stubborn self-protection, or for angry, organized assault, as they will.*

The two Gould strikes served further to emphasize the distinction between the maintenance men and the "runners," the engineers and firemen in the brotherhoods. In

* *History of Labor in the United States*, p. 371.

the first strike, the brotherhood men had in many instances co-operated with the strikers by refusing to pull struck stock. In the second strike, Arthur's insistence on neutrality had kept them very much above the battle.

In the courts a new legal weapon against labor was forged as a result of the strike calls. Many of the roads were in the hands of receivers and, technically, were run by the courts. In Denver, Judge Hallet sentenced five shopmen to jail for contempt of court. Their crime was that they had attempted to persuade an engineer to quit his cab. The affair took place 150 miles away from Judge Hallet's courtroom.

"We are threading a dangerous web," wrote a leading lawyer of Denver, commenting on this precedent-making decision. Gene was not slow to see the snares which the managers were setting for strike leaders of the future. He wrote indignantly on the subject.

Within two weeks after his arrival at Indianapolis, Gene acquired a healthy distaste for his legislative duties. Outside the smoke-hung corridors of the State House things were doing. There was evidently a new leaven at work in the lump of the unskilled. Inside amid hard-faced men, who knew nothing and cared less for the fate of his railroaders, Gene fell once more into a sombre mood. It was soon evident to him that his bill was doomed. He was on the Railway Committee, but he alone had any interest in pressing legislation for the relief of the workers. To his great disgust, the committee balked at reporting on his bill which provided for the payment of employees' liability. He lectured his fellow committeemen in a blistering speech which is unfortunately not recorded, and did succeed in resurrecting the bill. Then when it came out on the floor, with the disheartening comment of the majority of the

committee, to the effect that they took no stand one way or another, Gene pressed hard for its passage.

The older men in the legislature smiled behind their hands at Gene's unconcealed exaltation when his bill went through the Lower House. They knew well enough what was to happen. The Upper House expeditiously emasculated the measure. Gene raged when he saw what they had done to his proposal and peremptorily ordered its complete withdrawal from legislative consideration. He would have no such milk-and-water bill as that which alone the Upper House would consent to. For the rest of that session he sat bored and resentful, refusing even to acquire a working knowledge of the professional politician's technique. From January until the end of the session in March voluble Gene spoke no more than 200 words on the floor of the house.

He came back to Terre Haute thoroughly disillusioned as to the chances to do anything for labor with the political set-up of those days. He told Theodore, as they walked together through the new factory district on the river banks, that never again would he run for political office.

"I am through with that business, forever," said the man who fifteen years later was to run for President of the United States.

But when spring came in 1885, all thoughts of politics, trades-unions and the rest were swept aside. On June 17 Gene married Kate Metzel.

The ceremony took place in the Episcopal Church, a block or two from Gene's home. Gene was quite magnificent in a frock coat and a high hat. There was a flurried moment when he discovered that he had but one white

glove. When the bride appeared, all gold and white and very beautiful, nothing else mattered, not even the fact that far back in Gene's mind there was a gnawing scorn for the pomp and circumstance which surrounds an Episcopal marriage ceremony.

The two went east on their honeymoon. They went first to Pittsburgh, then to New York where Colonel Ingersoll held a reception for them. Even in those halcyon days there was official correspondence of the brotherhood to be answered, much sending of business telegrams on the part of Gene, and whenever he appeared in a hotel lobby there was sure to be a railroader lying in wait for him, anxious to talk union affairs.

Kate was proud of the attention shown her husband even in the remote East. Could she have had any premonition of the invading forces from the world of men which were to take Gene so much away from her—to leave her so much alone?

2

The luxuriant burnsides of Chief Arthur were much like those of his illustrious namesake, Chester. And the philosophy of the conservative Republican Vice President brought to the heights by Guiteau's bullet, and that of the head of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, was pretty nearly identical.

P. M. Arthur rode to his office in a carriage drawn by two horses and driven by a coachman. He said very flatly that "no engineer in the country was worth going to jail for." In 1884, he forced a resolution through his convention announcing that "no engineer who belongs to the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen shall hereafter rep-

resent his division in the annual convention of the locomotive engineers." It was an insulting and needless gesture in the direction of the oncoming fireman's organization. Few engineers, as a matter of fact, did belong to the firemen's Brotherhood, and the men on the left of the cabs were puzzled as to the reasons for Arthur's action. "That action," said their editor, "smacks of persecution. Its purpose is to embarrass our order." And thereupon there commenced the long-drawn-out debate between Arthur and Debs which was to occupy much of Gene's precious time for his remaining years with the firemen.

Certainly it was not a fight of Gene's choosing. Time and again the officials of the engineers went out of their way to demonstrate their superior social status over the firemen, and while the latter were at first a bit bewildered by Arthur's stand-offish attitude, they soon worked up a hot resentment, standing to a man behind their editor any time he struck out at the snobbery of Arthur's crew.

It was in the course of this conflict that Gene invented the phrase which still sticks to the more conservative brotherhood. In an editorial headed "The Aristocrats of Labor," he accused Arthur and the engineers of being as snobbish as any "society leaders," and "Go on, you goddam aristocrat" was hurled in derision at his overalled driver by many a plebeian scooper. Emphatically Gene was expressing his discontent with the lack of militancy inherent in the very organization of his own brotherhood. Now he began to pound away on a theme which was to be his major concern for the rest of his editorship. This was "Federation."

By "Federation" Gene meant a loose alliance of the brotherhoods, formed for offensive and defensive pur-

poses. It was not his idea that shop men should be forced to go to jail for attempting to persuade obdurate engine drivers to join them in a struggle for decent conditions. From the beginning he was leader of a minority cause. The convention of the firemen at Minneapolis in 1886 looked with some alarm upon Gene's latest proposal, and a conservative resolutions committee persuaded the delegates to adopt the following:

> Resolved, That we place ourselves on record as voicing the true sentiments of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen as being first, last and always opposed to amalgamation with any other organization, and that we instruct the editor of our magazine to make this resolution the subject of such comments as in his judgment may be necessary to place it properly before the public.

The comment of the editor was not exactly to the liking of those who had framed the resolution. Gene wrote in faint praise of its independent spirit and then added, "But it should everywhere be understood that the language of the resolution does not mean hostility to any other organizations. On the contrary, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen sends greetings of friendship and good will to all other organizations of wage men."

Forthwith he entered on an educational campaign, playing countless editorial variations on the theme of federation.

The motto must be, he wrote, "'United we stand; divided we fall.' For purposes of protection, the throttle and the scoop, the switch and the brake, must be in close alliance and equally firm and defiant, and when corporations see this federation accomplished, no strike will occur, because a strike under such circumstances would mean an immediate

cessation of railroad transportation on the line or system where it occurred. . . ."

At the same time that he was talking federation, it was his strategy to avert the fears of the railway managers over what might be deemed the one big union of railroad men with a general strike as its weapon, by assuring them and the public that any such federation would seek arbitration rather than to strike for the settling of grievances. Gene said in a convention speech: "The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen is conscious of its power, but seeks no contention. We are not engaged in any quarrel between capital and labor. There can be no such quarrel unless it is caused by deliberate piracy on one side and unreasonable demand on the other. . . . All we ask is an honest day's wages for an honest day's work, and we are willing to be considerate and just."

The move towards federation was spreading throughout the labor world. "The idea of the solidarity of labor ceased to be merely verbal, and took on flesh and life; general strikes, sympathetic strikes, nation-wide boycotts, and nation-wide political movements became the order of the day." *

The rallying-point for the pragmatic expression of solidarity was in the agitation for the eight-hour day. Men wearing every color of radicalism seized upon the shorter work day as a peg on which to hang their various philosophies. A "mother-wave" of immigration fell upon the Eastern seaboard during the early 1880's and foamed out into the Middle West. On it rode a host of "proletarian intellectuals," anxious to apply their economic philosophies

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* *History of Labor in the United States,* Commons, page 357.

to the American industrial situation. In Cincinnati, a strike of the Cigar Makers' International Union cost the organization $140,000 in strike benefits, "the largest expenditure of money ever made up to this time by labor organizations in a controversy with employers." In embattled Hocking Valley, the miners, under the leadership of John McBride of the Ohio State Miners' Union, went out on a prolonged strike which brought in Pinkertons, state deputies and militia, and resulted in disastrous defeat for the coal diggers.

The only national organization of the trades-unions had been largely a debating society, passing mild resolutions urging welfare legislation. The advocates of the eight-hour day swooped down upon this Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions with its membership of less than 50,000, and jammed through a resolution to the effect that "Eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from and after May 1, 1886." The Knights of Labor were invited to join in this ambitious program which could obviously be accomplished only by something very much in the nature of a general strike. In many industries, employers voluntarily shortened hours in the face of the increasing growth of trades-union solidarity. Eight-hour strikes, sporadic for the most part, broke out across the continent. And then, on a rain-swept square in Chicago, a bomb exploded, putting an abrupt end for the time being, at any rate, to all this agitation.

Chicago was the headquarters for the more militant eight-hour agitators. They had for their leader Albert R. Parsons, who had fought in the Confederate Army, was a Federal officeholder under Grant, and was now the organizer of the Chicago Eight-Hour League. Associated with him were a number of foreign-born agitators who had

a misty anarchistic philosophy and who published a ferocious little sheet called, appropriately enough, *The Alarm*. The first issue of *The Alarm* carried in bold type the command "Learn the use of explosives." Parsons and his group avowed their fealty to the Black International, the anarchist organization, thus sinisterly named to differentiate it from the Red International of the Socialists.

In Chicago, the anarchists, largely due to the fact that the American-born Parsons commanded a good-sized following, were able to summon up a respectable membership from among workers in such unlikely trades-unions as the carpenters, printers and metal workers. The city woke up to what was going on when it looked out of its collective window to see red flags and black on the streets on Thanksgiving Day of 1885.

On the first of May next, following a period of agitation conducted in the most extreme revolutionary terms—"We urgently call upon the wage-earning class to arm itself"—40,000 Chicago workers acting on the program set down by the trades-union federation walked out of factories, lumber yards and railroad shops. Three days later stones were thrown, shots fired, in front of the McCormick Reaper Works where August Spies, an "anarchist" agitator was addressing a meeting. Four strikers were killed. Spies looked on the dead and went to his office to write a call for their avenging. He concluded with the words: "Working men, arm yourselves and appear in full force." He announced a meeting of protest against the shooting, to be held on the evening of the following day, May 4th, in Haymarket Square. A steady rain kept the crowd down to a few hundred. Mayor Carter Harrison listened to the speeches of Spies and his fellow-orator,

Parsons, who confined himself to the discussion of the eight-hour day, and Samuel Fielden, an Englishman. It was evident to the mayor that there was nothing much to be feared from this group of out-of-work men huddling together below the speakers' platform. He went to the nearest police-station house and informed the officer in command that there would be no work for him that night. The latter, however, paid no attention to the mayor, and after Harrison left for his home, the police captain, at the head of 180 men, swung into the square shouting orders for the meeting to disperse. Fielden, who was speaking at the time, cried out "Here is a peaceable meeting." The police captain turned to give an order, and at that moment a bomb exploded among the on-coming bluecoats. A police sergeant was blown to bits, and 60 patrolmen were knocked flat.

"The effect of that bomb," said Samuel Gompers afterwards, "was that it not only killed the policeman but it killed our eight-hour movement for that year and for a few years after, notwithstanding we had absolutely no connection with these people."

The public, which read its newspapers the next morning with affrighted eyes, was in no mood for differentiating among various proletarian philosophies. Anarchy was abroad in the land. A new revolution threatened. And there was a mighty roar from press and pulpit and platform for the speedy extermination of "The Black Beast." A jury, some of whose members frankly admitted prejudice, found Parsons, Spies, Fielden, and Michael Schwab, Adolph Fischer, George Engel and Louis Linng, the last four German immigrants, guilty of the murder of the policeman—this despite the fact that there was no direct evi-

(Courtesy of Frank X. Holl)

SECRETARY OF THE FIREMEN, 1886

dence connecting them with the throwing of the bomb. The death sentence was imposed on the seven: Oscar W. Neebe, an American of German parentage, was sentenced to imprisonment for fifteen years as being guilty of the same crime. The case was carried to the Supreme Court, and in the autumn of 1887 the sentences were upheld. On November 10th, Linng, unable to bear the approaching shadow of the gallows, blew off the top of his head in his cell in the county jail.

Despite the pleas of progressive labor men and liberals, Gene among them, Parsons, Fischer, Engel and Spies were hanged on November 11th. The sentences of Fielden and Schwab were commuted to life imprisonment. The springing of the traps announced the end of the Black International.

But while the workingmen hastily withdrew from anything which hinted of revolution, the reign of terror instituted by the employing classes forced them into a protective solidarity so that labor historians can now speak truthfully of "the United Front of 1886."

3

Back in Terre Haute Gene and his bride were getting acquainted with their new home, a two-story-and-attic frame affair at 447 North Eighth Street.

With the brotherhood debt cleared up Gene was now drawing a good salary from the organization. He had an office in the business section of the town, where every day, from early in the morning until supper time, he waded through a mountain of correspondence, striding up and down the room and dictating to Theodore, who was master-

ing a pioneer typewriter. Gene regarded Theodore's skill at this cumbersome machine with admiration. He himself never learned to run a typewriter and, in the absence of Theodore, answered in longhand as voluminous a correspondence as any man in public life ever received.

There was every indication that Gene, hailed by a local historian as one of "the most enterprising and respected of our citizens," was about to settle down into the routine of a successful labor leader.

And then, in spite of all the pious resolves to ignore strikes, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen ran into a head-on collision with the management of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy R.R.

In February, 1888, the C. B. & Q. engineers, who were receiving the lowest wages paid by any road running into Chicago, struck for a raise. They were promptly joined in their demands by the scoopers, and for the first time in his life, P. M. Arthur found himself signing what amounted to an ultimatum. In his demand for better wages and conditions he was joined by the Grand Master of the firemen. Gene, scenting the battle from afar, packed up his bag again and went out to tell the strikers to stick to a triumphant end. He was so exhilarated with the revival of militancy that he actually praised Arthur for his "courage and modesty."

To Gene's great surprise, a visitor at his office one day was none other than Arthur himself. The head of the engineers was plainly embarrassed. He talked generalities for a while, and finally blurted out, "Debs, we have got to get the switchmen out." Gene looked up. "Sure," said Gene. "Why don't *you* call them out?" "They won't come," said Arthur shortly. Gene sighted at the burnsides down an accusing forefinger. "That's because when the

switchmen strike not one of your aristocratic engineers will do so much as get off his engine." Arthur moved uneasily, and Gene didn't press the lesson in federation any further. He went out forthwith, and the switchmen, recognizing in him an old friend, joined in the strike at his say-so.

Aside from Gene, there were few competent strike leaders in the two affected brotherhoods. The best men among the organizers in the Knights, embittered by the high and mighty attitude of Arthur during the Gould strikes, kept their hands off. They did nothing to stop their membership from scabbing on the C. B. & Q. strikers until Gene went to Buchanan and asked him to keep the Knights out of the strike.

Debs said, according to the "Rip-roarer," "You are too true a friend of the cause of labor to allow another man's errors or your own personal grievances to govern your course, Buchanan. No matter how leaders may err, it is your duty and mine to exert what influence we may possess to prevent organized workingmen from cutting each other's throats." "I liked Debs," Buchanan wrote in his autobiography. "He was loyal and frank; besides, I saw the truth and good sense in his remark." Buchanan put an end to the strike-breaking on the part of the Knights.

The C. B. & Q. strike overshadowed even federation in the columns of the *Firemen's Magazine.*

"The strike," wrote Gene, "is the weapon of the oppressed, of men capable of appreciating justice and having the courage to resist wrong and contend for principle. The nation had for its corner stone a strike, and while arrogant injustice throws down the gauntlet and challenges the right to the conflict, strikes will come, come by virtue of irrev-

ocable laws, destined to have a wider sweep and greater power as men advance in intelligence and independence."

The editor flung out against "statutes made in the interests of corporations and under which they have been and are still enabled to play the rôle of oppressors. It matters not under what outrages employees of corporations may labor, no officer, chairman or leader of any labor organization can so much as advise resistance, without being held liable to prosecution for conspiracy, the penalty being a fine and imprisonment."

Here was a different tone indeed from that "No! A thousand times NO!" used by the conciliatory Gene of 1877, discussing the enormity of strikes. Then there had been little contact with men pounding cold hands together on picket lines and watching strike breakers marching into yards under the guns of deputies. In 1877, Gene had not seen with his own eyes the grim business of a long-drawn strike operating in the homes of its participants. Intellectually perhaps he might have been touched by the sufferings of the workers, but emotionally no. And now it was his heart which framed the angry words of 1888.

Of the editor of a contemporary labor paper denouncing strikes, even as Gene had done a short while back, Debs said: "He wails like the east wind around the corner of a pigsty."

Of the Pinkerton detectives, busy breaking the "Q" strike, he wrote:

> They are distorted, deformed, hideous mentally and morally. Their trade is treason, their breath pollution and yet the officials of the C. B. & Q. formed a conspiracy with these professional liars, perjurers, forgers, cut-throats and murderers to overcome a strike, the result of a policy of flagrant injustice.

He paid this delicate compliment to suspected *agents provocateur* involved in dynamiting the tracks of the struck road:

> The warts on the repulsive backs of dungeon toads are things of beauty in comparison.

And to an astonished railroad superintendent he sent the following:

> That you would have played an important part in the time of the Spanish Inquisition, I do not doubt. That you would have been nimble with the thumbscrew, rack and wheel is evident: even now you are willing to see men in enforced idleness who have the manhood to spit upon your decree to abandon their Brotherhood organization.

He was laying the foundations for that large vocabulary of vituperation which he was to employ so frequently in later years.

The C. B. & Q. management moved on the strikers with all the trappings of industrialists at war with their men —Pinkertons, spies, court orders and strike breakers—and when the firemen met in Atlanta in 1888, it was evident that the strike was petering out. Gene looked on unhappily at the grand ball in Concordia Hall, where as a local scribe had it, "fair women and gallant men moved in the mazy dance to the witching strains of music, where beauty shone resplendent and social felicities ruled the hour."

With a losing strike on their hands, Gene knew that the officials must appease the delegates with something more tangible than "witching strains." He decided that the time had come to risk his federation project. In it he saw a long-viewed policy which, if carried through, would make any management think twice before cutting wages. The tie-up

of a system from roundhouse to the farthest terminal was nothing to be sneezed at.

As soon as the convention got down to business, Gene proposed that immediate steps be taken to bring into a federation the six railroad workers' organizations, the engineers, firemen, and brakemen brotherhoods, the Order of Railway Conductors, the Yardmasters' Mutual Benefit Association and the Switchmen's Mutual Aid Association.

He had done his educational work well. The convention's mood was co-operative. Like Gene, the delegates had seen the disastrous effects of isolation. They set up a committee, consisting of F. P. Sargent, Grand Master of the Firemen, Vice Grand Master J. J. Hannahan and Debs, authorized to confer with the other rail organizations.

Debs returned to Terre Haute exultant.

"We hail with becoming satisfaction," said his leading editorial in the next issue after the convention, "the dawn of the new era of fraternal unity which we believe the future has in store for the brotherhoods of railroad employees, and in the future, as in the past, this magazine will labor for its fullest realization."

The switchmen jumped at the federation idea, as did the brakemen later on. But the engineers, the keymen of the plan, could not be budged. Overwhelmingly, they voted for "strict neutrality." The conductors likewise saw nothing for themselves in federation.

The action of the engineers further enraged the rank and file of the scoopers. General Manager Stone of the C. B. & Q. had offered to take on firemen and make engineers of them if they would come back to work. This offer had been contemptuously rejected. The firemen had come out after the strike had been called by the engineers, and they

had stuck to the tragic end. Now the engineers were kicking Gene (and through him every scooper in the Brotherhood) square in the face.

In hot retaliation, the firemen made a rule that none of their members could join the B. of L. E. unless he first renounced his affiliation with the firemen.

It was a false dawn which Gene had hailed. He saw that the firemen themselves had no real heart for federation. They had followed him simply out of loyalty to a personality. Now after the flare-up on the "Q," the officials were going back to a smug do-nothing policy.

He went to the last convention at which he was to read his secretary's report, a bitterly disappointed man.

4

Although Gene's official colleagues had inklings of his intentions when they came together at the 1892 convention in Cincinnati, his sudden announcement at the conclusion of his report that he was resigning from the brotherhood, took the delegates completely by surprise. They sat staring up at him, open-mouthed. Then when they came to full realization of what their idol was saying, there was a roar of protest. Men ran down the aisles, shouting "You can't do it, Gene"; "We won't let you go"; "We want Debs, Debs, Debs."

But Gene, with tears in his eyes, shook his head at them. He was through.

Unanimously they thundered down his own motion that his resignation be accepted. Never would they hear of such a thing. Why, by God, what would the brotherhood be without Gene Debs? The face of the tall man on the plat-

form saddened as he looked out over the protesting delegates. Most of them he called by their first names. He loved them, but he had nothing more to give them. He must wrench himself away from this creation of his own hands and brain. Something inside him said that otherwise his integrity would be endangered.

He could not stay in an organization with whose fundamental policies he had begun so passionately to differ.

A delegate suggested that Gene was tired and needed a rest. Over Gene's protest, the convention voted him $2,000 for a trip to Europe for his "rest and enjoyment." Gene, touched by this naïve generosity, shook his head again. He couldn't take the money. The convention would not listen to this. They appropriated the money anyway and it remains untouched to this day in the treasury of the brotherhood.

Finally Gene waved the convention to order. He told them that he was resolved on his course. That nothing the delegates could do would move him. He said that he found himself in opposition to many of the brotherhood's cardinal principles. The official attitude of "ignoring strikes," for example. The lack of sympathy for the plight of the unskilled workers. The secrecy surrounding lodge meetings —a number of things, in short, over which he had been brooding since the "Q" strike. And feeling thus, it was impossible for him to stay on as their secretary. He had in mind a project which might bring him into open opposition with the conservative policies of the brotherhood. It would be unfair to them and to him to stay inside the organization.

"That's definite, boys," he said, "I'm through."

(Courtesy of Frank X. Holl)

A CONVENTION OF THE LOCOMOTIVE FIREMEN

Gene is second from right in the center row

As he walked back across the platform to his seat, the scoopers wiped furtive sleeves across their eyes. There was the embarrassed snuffling of men who are pretending not to weep.

That night a delegation from the convention came to Gene's room. They said that much against their will, they had to take Gene's word for it that he wanted to resign. But wouldn't he stay on as editor, even if he resigned as secretary-treasurer? It was a strange offer, they admitted. There they were begging a man who had openly stated his opposition to their official policies to remain as head of their official paper. But that was how it was. They wanted Gene's name up there on the magazine's masthead. His name meant so much to them and to the world of workers outside the brotherhood.

Gene told them to come back in an hour for his decision. When the delegation left, he lighted a pipe and filled several sheets of hotel writing paper with that neat longhand of his. An hour later, he announced to the tense scoopers that he would go on as editor with these stipulations: First, that he should not be a member of the official brotherhood family; second, that he should have nothing to do with the financial affairs of the magazine; third, that his salary should not exceed the sum of $900 a year. The delegation accepted the first two of these terms gladly. But they insisted that his salary should be $3,000. Finally a compromise of $1,000 was agreed on.

For the past five years Gene's combined salary as secretary and editor had been $4,000. But of all the things he was giving up, last in his mind was this comfortable salary. Rather, the friendships which he knew could not much

longer continue, the bluff camaraderie of the scoop handlers, the ending of that chapter of crowded life within the brotherhood—thoughts of these finalities kept him awake all that night.

CHAPTER VIII

"FRESH WINDS OF OPINION"

HIS quitting of the brotherhood seemed nothing short of an impetuous act of folly to his friends who came down to Terre Haute right after the convention to plead with him to stay inside the old line organized movement. It is evident that Gene himself had not realized, until the decisive moment when he took the platform and was forced to explain his stand, how sharply he had been veering away since the "Q" strike from the cautious strategy of other brotherhood leaders. He had been turning constantly from trades-union politics which, with their complicated and none too edifying maneuverings for place and power, distressed him utterly, to the simple human problems presented by the rank and file. It was, in the long run, democracy, in conflict with a rather shoddy and decidedly acquisitive lower middle-class philosophy. This Gene had chosen to call "aristocracy." But it was the aristocracy of the snob, and not the spirit, which animated the hierarchies of the two "runner brotherhoods."

It was to the rank and file, then, that he must return for a renewal of that youthful enthusiasm which had made any sacrifice on their behalf seem trivial. Fundamentally, Gene believed that the men of the throttle and the scoop were sound. He had a faith in their integrity which to his friends was sublime; to his enemies ridiculous. He had no patience for that oft-repeated argument that the rank and file are

no better than their leaders. Fiercely he would contend that it was because the leaders had lost the saving touch with the everyday lives of their followers that they became soft, contented and corrupt. A deep-seated belief in his ability to bring leadership to a democratic level brought him through the hesitations of the days following his resignation to a clean-cut industrial program. This was worked out slowly and laboriously in the writing of many letters, in long talks at his office with Theodore and such confidants as George W. Howard, Sylvester Keliher and Jesse Cox, who, like Gene, were done with the snail-like progress of the brotherhoods. When finally Gene was ready to announce his program, he had put into it all the essential ingredients of the American radicalism of the time, stopping short of such disastrous gesturings as the anarchists employed. He proposed to go out among the railroaders and organize them into one big union irrespective of class or craft distinction. In that organization an injury to the most obscure maintenance-of-way man would be looked upon as an injury to all. The officials of this organization were to receive no fancy salaries, nor were they to sit apart from the membership. Dues were to be low. No quarrels would be deliberately sought with managers, but should a conflict arise, then from engine cabs to freight sidings there would be a wholesale and crippling desertion of the workers. Unlike the Knights, the new organization would concentrate on industrial demands. In short, he was thinking in terms of industrial unionism, though that phrase was not much in use at the time. The preamble of the Knights, the manifestoes of the Socialists, the programs of Henry George's followers, the pragmatism of the A. F. of L.—these played their various parts in the formulation of the phi-

losophy of Eugene Victor Debs in the first days of the year 1893. These were the threads home spun from a loom of Jacksonian democracy. And out of that philosophy was born the American Railway Union. An historian of the American Railway Union says:

> The exploration of the field was not the work of a month nor a year. It required a profound study of conditions and of remedies. It required a knowledge of men and of their resources, their needs and aspirations. The magnitude of the work is seen in the number that required assistance. There were at least 700,000 who had never been organized, and as has been stated, many thousands, who had been members of the various organizations, who had been thrust out and deprived of their benefits, constituting an army of delinquents, who, having paid dues and assessments from their earnings until exhausted, were forced, by the brotherhoods—heaven save the mark—to join the army of excommunicants, and thousands of them went into exile, not only to cover their ill luck but to anathematise the term "brotherhood." At this supreme juncture, after years of thought for the welfare of this vast army of unorganized railway employees, the American Railway Union was organized. Behind it stood the facts we have recited; before it, herculean tasks to bring order out of chaos and secure by new methods the blessings of wise and beneficent organization. It involved the severest rules of applied economics. Organization demanded money, but in fixing the rate of taxation the question was not how much could be extorted, but how little could be made to meet the requirements. There must be no spectacular displays, no nabobism, and the world was to be taught that every legitimate need of organization could be reached at an expenditure so small as would revolutionize the financial theories of organization." *

On June 20, 1893, Gene wrote a press-release announcing that the American Railway Union had been organized, and inviting railway workers, irrespective of their crafts,

* *The Railway Times,* Sept. 2, 1895.

to join. Gene and some fifty carefully picked men had met in Chicago that day, drawn up a constitution for their industrial union, "explored the field" a bit further, and were now ready to present their case to a "candid world" of the rank and file. Gene as president of the A. R. U. set his salary at $75 a month.

"I do this," he said, "because it pleases me, and there is nothing I would not do, so far as human effort goes, to advance any movement designed to reach and rescue perishing humanity. I have a heart for others and that is why I am in this work. When I see suffering about me, I myself suffer, and so when I put forth my efforts to relieve others I am simply working for myself. I do not consider that I have made any sacrifice whatever; no man does unless he violates his conscience." And again Gene said: "It has been my life's desire to unify the railroad employees and to eliminate the aristocracy in labor which unfortunately exists and organize the workers so all will be on an equality." Finally, he summed up his personal attitude towards leadership in these flaming words: "If I rise, it will be *with* the ranks, not *from* them."

Gene, with George Howard, who had headed the conductors, as his vice president, Keliher, also from the conductors' brotherhood, as secretary, and a half hundred followers, went riding out to new adventure in times of new upheavals.

In the nation "fresh winds of opinion were blowing back and forth." Workers, little shop-keepers, farmers and middle-class intellectuals were still discussing the novel ideas set down in 1888 by Edward Bellamy in his book *Looking Backward*. It is probable that no one was more surprised than its author at its immense popularity, and, espe-

cially, the eager welcome accorded its scientifically utopian theme by the delighted radicals. Bellamy, born in Chicopee Falls, Mass., of old American stock, editor of the eminently respectable *Springfield Daily News*, could not appreciate the joy with which the isolated, foreign-born socialists hailed the appearance of his masterpiece. To them it was proof positive that at length they were penetrating into those vast, indifferent and, to them, highly baffling spaces where roamed the American mind. Here, said the Germans in their meeting halls in the *bier-stuben* of the big cities, is the first appearance of an indigenous radicalism this side the Atlantic. Before he had quite recovered from the shock of awaking to find himself a Yankee Messiah for east side revolutionists, he was being escorted onto platforms, where, under Socialist auspices, he lectured on his dream of a new society.

With much the same enthusiasm, the Socialists welcomed the American Railway Union. Their organ, *The People*, said of Gene's project;

> The new organization starts with an admirable move. It casts off the old "aristocracy of labor" pretensions and reaches the hand down to the least skilled in the railroad service. From this deliberate or instinctive recognition of the identity of the class interests of all the railroad employees golden fruits may be expected; it is a step in the direction of clasping hands with the whole working class in all other industries, of recognizing the solidarity of its interests, and of taking a position before which all false impressions must vanish, and the question, the real question, appears in its only practical light and its full grandeur—the abolition of the capitalist system of production, the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth.*

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* *Labor and Farmers Parties in the United States,* Nathan Fine, p. 187.

No such welcome for the newcomer issued from the brotherhoods. The officials of the old-line unions read the declaration of principles of the A. R. U., and, seeing a potential rival of great strength in its appearance, were profanely exercised. But publicly they kept silence. They did not even raise the cry of "dual unionism" so frequently hurled by unionists already in the field against new arrivals. It was not healthy to attack any project which had the name of Debs at its masthead, so strong was the spell of those four letters upon the railroaders. In the ears of the conservative officials still rang the shouts of the firemen at Cincinnati.

"In all probability," said Grand Master Sargent of the Firemen, in an attempt to explain to a skeptical convention his attitude towards the A. R. U. in its first days, "an organization never was instituted that had at its head a more prominent representative than had the A. R. U. Brother Eugene V. Debs was better known to the rank and file of labor and in all probability had more friends than any other man who ever occupied a like position. His connection with the B. L. F., dating back over a period of sixteen years, and his faithful devotion to its interests, his connection with the labor movement as represented by the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and other organizations of like character, his prominence as an advocate of federation, his long connection with the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, had made him a very popular and influential man. No one can dispute the fact that in entering upon the movement, Brother Debs carried with him the best wishes of the majority of the membership of the B. L. F. and no wonder," continued Sargent with a certain bitterness, "after reading the declaration of principles

as set forth in the early proclamations issued by the union wherein everything was promised and at scarcely any expense; when strikes and boycotts were to be things of the past; that members of the B. L. F. availed themselves of an opportunity of membership and many became affiliated with the organization."

This last was a conservative statement of the way the American Railway Union flourished from the beginning. As a matter of fact, engineers, firemen, switchmen, brakemen, shopmen and track walkers swept into the A. R. U. by the thousands. Their imaginations had been conquered by a man who could say that he was coming up *with* the ranks. These were the clicking words for which they had been waiting. They recognized the sincerity of this thoroughbred who backed his words with deeds. The story of Gene's giving up that $4,000 salary was told whenever his name was mentioned. "Catch Gompers or Arthur or Powderly doing that? Not on your life. They just don't know what Gene is all about. But we do, and if he says it's the A. R. U., then that's our ticket."

It was a matter of organization of the willing, rather than agitation of the hesitant. Through the panic summer of 1893, Gene ranged a countryside filled with mortgaged farms, bankrupt businesses, Populists exultant over their one million votes for old General Weaver, and railroaders wearied of supporting organizations which gave them nothing in return. To them Gene appeared as a deliverer, indeed. Once more men swarmed around him "wanting in."

Behind Gene came the black-bearded Howard, gruff, loyal and a detail man in a thousand. Keliher, aflame with the excitement of the quest, brought along his Irish gusto. In Terre Haute, Theodore jabbed at his typewriter and

performed miracles with two fingers. In Terre Haute, too, Kate Debs began to wonder whether she had married a man of flesh and blood or an intangible called the Labor Movement.

"We meet," said the platform adopted by the first national convention of the Populists in July, 1892:

> . . . in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized. . . . The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled; public opinion silenced; business prostrated; our homes covered with mortgages; labor impoverished; and the land concentrated in the hands of capitalists. . . . The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for the few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of these, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice are bred the two great classes of tramps and millionaires.*

That next summer things were even worse. Fifteen-cent corn, five-cent cotton, made the advice of Mrs. Mary Ellen Lease of Kansas, "quit raising corn and begin raising hell," seem divine wisdom to the desperate farmers. Threatening gestures were made in the direction of Washington where Cleveland, prompted from the wings by August Belmont, was attempting to lay the ghost of free silver by the simple expedient of ordering that national bank notes upon a gold basis should be made "the only money." †

The submerged people gave ear to the golden voice of

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* *Coxey's Army,* Donald L. McMurry, page 7.

† *William Jennings Bryan,* Paxton Hibben, page 151.

William Jennings Bryan pleading for silver in the House of Representatives:

> When a crisis like the present arose and the national bank of his day sought to control the politics of the nation, God raised up an Andrew Jackson, who had the courage to grapple with that great enemy, and, by overthrowing it, he made himself the idol of the people and reinstated the Democratic party in public confidence.

Gene stopped his organizing work long enough to tell reporters that this was a "bankers' panic." He was on all fours with the Nebraskan in his estimate of the situation. Only, Gene saw salvation in organization, Bryan in legislation. Gene used the situation for the building up of an organization which was to rock those oft-rocked foundations of the republic once again. Bryan used it for the building of a political machine. And both men reaped a harvest of hate and love whose equal in passion had not been seen in this country.

The performance of Gene and his sturdy lieutenants is best expressed by the fact that within one year the American Railway Union had 465 lodges with a membership around 150,000. What Gompers, in a lyric moment (which he later was to regret) called "the inarticulate protest of the masses against the wrongs inflicted upon any of their brothers," had found its lusty voice, so far as the railroaders were concerned.

For the stirring up of his people Gene had forsaken every personal interest. "For weeks, even months at a stretch, Gene would be dashing about from one city to another, too harried for more than a hurried line or brief telegram to Katherine. Sometimes at the end of grilling weeks of frantic labor he would come home utterly exhausted only

to be called out again by urgent messages before he had enjoyed a single day of home and rest," writes Kate O'Hare. But Gene would reach out and squeeze Theodore's knee and exult: "By God, boy, they're coming in." He was doing it because it "pleased him." And, while such self-immolation might have seemed a strange form of pleasure to Katherine, Theodore understood.

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"Give me enough Swedes and snuff and I will build a railroad to hell," said James J. Hill. Jim Hill was in the raw then. Neither time nor the press agents had crowned him "empire-builder." Of this St. Paul butter and egg dealer, who had started with $15,000,000 of unpaid for stock in 1879 and who was taking as extra profits from the Great Northern railway $2,000,000 in 1893, an associate wrote:

> I had a talk with Jim Hill last Knight (sic.). He disclaims any intention on his part to ignore my claim. But he is such a Lyer can't believe him.*

In his pocket Gene, in the early days of 1894, was carrying letters from workers on the Great Northern urging him to call a strike against Hill. Hill was head of a 4,000 mile system, one of the most powerful on the continent. The Great Northern had completed a through line to Seattle three years before. It was reaching north to a connection with the Canadian Pacific, then under construction. It had developed feeders through the Dakotas, lines to Butte and

* *Railroad Melons, Rates and Wages,* Charles Edward Russell, p. 199.

Anaconda. Great Northern stock, even in those depressed days, was way up.

But although he had made satisfactory wage contracts with the runner brotherhoods, Hill, on April 1, 1894, was cutting his common labor 25 cents a day. On his lines west of Minot, N. D., laborers were receiving $1.25 a day, east of Minot, $1.00.

"This reduction," said Gene, "was made by Hill because he knew the condition of organized labor. All the regular organizations submitted to it because they knew that they could not possibly win a strike. But the American Railway Union resisted it. . . ."

At the first signs of trouble, however, the president of the A. R. U. was by no means in a mood to buck Hill. He hung back from throwing his raw troops into a struggle with so mighty an antagonist. To Howard, in St. Paul, Gene, who was organizing in the Far West, sent a number of telegrams urging his vice president to try out every avenue leading to arbitration. But Hill would not arbitrate. He had a trump-card in the shape of his agreements signed with the engineer and firemen brotherhoods. "Railway corporations use one organization to defeat another," Gene had said. Now Hill was playing the brotherhoods against the year-old A. R. U. If the laborers struck, it would be an outlaw affair contended Hill to the sorely perplexed Grand Master Sargent of the firemen, and the Great Northern management would expect the brotherhoods to help break the strike. Sargent was evasive. He wanted to live up to his contract, but he had no wish to appear before the rank and file as being hostile to Gene.

While these skirmishes were in progress, while Gene was still talking arbitration, the rank and file took things

into their own calloused hands. Howard sent frantic word to Gene that a large-scale walkout was under way. He must order a strike; the decree had come from below. Reluctantly, Gene gave consent to a general strike call for all members of the A. R. U. in Hill's employ. They came out with a rush.

Gene and Theodore arrived in St. Paul on April 18th in the midst of a torrential rain, five days after the strike began. They found Howard at the Hotel Sherman, taciturn as ever, but plainly worried. Out west, the boys were making a good fight but in and around the Twin Cities, the salient of the situation, there had been but little response to the call.

Into the group in the hotel room tumbled a young switchman, his black, oilskin hat shedding streams of rainwater. He wiped a hand across his dripping face and said despondently: "They won't come out." Howard turned to Gene. "You know how many organized switchmen we've got in the Twin Cities?" He answered his own question. "Eleven, just eleven."

Gene walked across the room and took the youngster by a wet shoulder.

"Can I trust you, son?"

"You sure can, Gene."

"All right then, go to every paper in St. Paul and Minneapolis, and tell them that President Debs of the A. R. U. has ordered Vice President Howard's call for a strike on this division held up until a conference can be called. Here's your authority." He wrote a few lines on a piece of paper, gave it to the switchman, and grinned as the latter bolted for the hall.

Howard was angry. "What's the idea of that?" "I have

a plan, George," said Gene mildly. "Now let's get some sleep."

But Gene did not sleep. Theodore remembers seeing his brother staring out into rain-swept streets until morning. The papers that day gloated over the fact that the "conservative" Debs had countermanded the "radical" Howard's order. Gene was gently ironic about this when the three A. R. U. men met at breakfast. Then he was all action. He sent Theodore galloping off to hire halls in St. Paul and Minneapolis. Howard he put to work getting handbills struck off announcing the meetings. He saw the newspaper men, told them there would be news at those meetings, and then kept minor A. R. U. officials, who had come to the Sherman at news of his arrival, on the dead run all day.

Great Northern men jammed the hall that night. What was Debs about? Was he going to skedaddle away from Hill or stand up and fight? There was a stamping of feet from the few faithful scattered around the hall when Debs started to speak. But on the whole the audience was cold. He began slowly with a detailed description of the strike set-up. He did not minimize the deadliness of a struggle with a man as powerful as Hill. He spoke of the injunction issued against the strike leaders by Judge Sanborn on behalf of the Great Northern. And then he swung of a sudden into a thrilling appeal to the men in front of him to stand together at this time. He spoke for an hour, and when he was done and asked those who wanted to join the A. R. U. to rise, row after cheering row got up. Exultant ushers signed them up while Gene and Theodore drove to Minneapolis on one wheel of a swaying cab. There Gene did the trick again.

All the while Gene was talking at the Minneapolis meet-

ing, Theodore, in the wings, noticed that a man who, by his clothes, was no railroader, was bobbing back and forth on the platform, in an anxious effort to attract Gene's attention. Finally Theodore decided to throw this intruder out. He went over to him with fire in his eye. The man in the high white collar hastily explained that he had come from a committee of Twin City business men now in session in the Chamber of Commerce building. It was most important that Mr. Debs come to the meeting at once. As Gene finished his speech, worn with the emotional stress of it but exultant at the sight of men standing in line to get their union cards, Theodore told him of this strange request.

"All right," said Gene to the excited messenger clawing at his lapel, "we'll talk to your Chamber of Commerce."

Ten minutes later the two tall men from Terre Haute were being ushered into a meeting room full of whispering men. Here were bankers, business men, merchants large and small, sitting around the walls staring in frank curiosity at Gene and Theodore who had been left standing in the middle of the room. There had evidently been a hitch somewhere. The committee chairman was not to be found and no other came forward to greet the two labor men. Somebody tittered nervously. Gene turned a fierce and silencing glance in the direction of the laughter. "God damn them," he said to Theodore in an undertone, "they may hate us but I'm going to make 'em respect us." Finally a flustered chairman arrived, called the meeting to order, had a chair brought in for Theodore and introduced "Mr. Debs, who has come to give us his version of the Great Northern situation."

Gene started mildly, expressed his surprise and pleasure at being invited to address such a distinguished gathering,

etc. But pretty soon the tempo quickened. Pretty soon Gene was taking his listeners right inside a switchman's home, introducing them to the switchman's family, telling something of what it means to live on a dollar a day. Then he turned his guns on Jim Hill, said out loud some unpleasant truths about the effects of low wages on a community, explained the fundamentals of unionism, did a number of oratorical things so surprisingly well that the applause was more than polite at the end. He was deluged with apologies. No one had grasped the true facts. "So sorry you had to stand when you came in. Now if there were any way to arbitrate this business, the merchants' committee would be most happy to co-operate. A man of your type, Mr. Debs, is evidently not the usual run of labor agitator (Gene looked ugly for a moment) and, of course, if we had known . . ."

The upshot of Gene's talk was a committee of Twin City business men who pressed Hill to arbitrate. Hill flatly refused. "There is no real strike on the Great Northern. The men have been upset by outside agitators."

"Operate your road," challenged Gene from his room on the fourth floor of the Sherman where he was receiving reports of the triumphant march of the strike from St. Paul to the Coast.

Hill countered by announcing a raise in pay for his runners. Gene, realizing that, in a strike, the essence of success is speed, put extra pressure on the brotherhood men who were also members of the A. R. U. to stay away from the engines. They answered his call. Hill sent out reports that militia were beginning to move against the strikers. He called on the authorities to back up Judge Sanborn's injunction with bayonets. But there was no violence. On the

four thousand struck miles of Great Northern no violence was anywhere reported. The men in their meetings listened to the reading of telegrams from Gene, urging that they keep away from saloons and crowds. "They just went to their homes and stayed there," said a reporter.

Now Hill called on Governor Knute Nelson of Minnesota to reason with this man Debs.

The governor's conception of reasoning was to keep Gene waiting in the anteroom of the executive offices for nearly an hour, and then bellow "agitator," "foreigner," "anarchist."

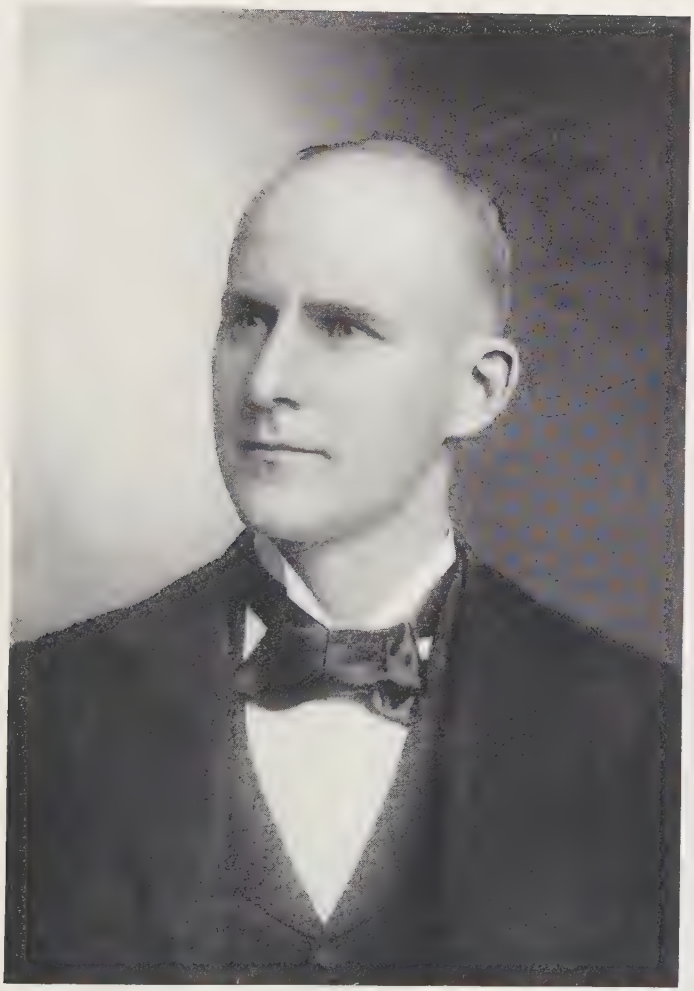
When Nelson was through, Gene's forefinger was levelled.

"I have never in my life worn the collar of a plutocrat nor jumped like a jack when he pulled the string as you have done for Mr. Hill." *

Hill then met the business men's committee, headed by Charles Pillsbury, of milling fame, and after a conference, Debs and the other American Railway Union officials were invited. Hill once more stressed the contracts made with the brotherhoods and offered to arbitrate, provided the brotherhoods were allowed to sit in on any agreements made. Gene parried this divide-and-conquer move.

> Let me say that we do not accept the proposition. Efforts have been made ever since this trouble started to divide the organization and make trouble between the union and the brotherhoods. I understand such to be the policy of this company.
>
> Now, if the other organizations represent the men, let them set your wheels turning. Our men will not go back to work. My idea is that in raising the question of representation you

* *Debs—Authorized Life and Letters,* David Karsner, page 134.



(Courtesy of Frank X. Holl)

ORGANIZER OF THE A. R. U.

have sought to evade the issue. We presented the terms upon which we would go to work. I am authorized to say that we will settle on these terms and on no others. This grievance is a universal grievance and all the men are united in this action. It will be to no avail to attempt to divide us into factions. . . .*

On the evening of May 1st, doors which had been closed on a prolonged conference of business men, railroad officials and American Railway Union officers swung open. Newspapermen sprinted for their offices.

REJOICING!
The Greatest Strike
Of Modern Times
Was Ended Last Night

Thus the heading of the *St. Paul Post* the next day. "Lovely!" was the bitter comment of the *Chicago Tribune,* stung by the victory of the strikers.

Hill had granted ninety-seven per cent of Gene's demands. This meant $146,000 more a month for the laborers.

Hill went over to Gene when the terms of settlement were announced.

"How about me, Debs?" he grinned, "how can I get my pay raised?"

"That can be arranged," said Gene solemnly, "I will propose your name as a member of the American Railway Union."

But Hill and Debs were not yet through with each other. When Gene got back to his hotel there was a message from Hill asking Gene to come immediately to the Great Northern offices.

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* *Debs—Authorized Life and Letters,* David Karsner, page 134.

He found Hill raging up and down the telegraph room. The men out on the division points would not believe that the strike was over. They were tearing up the messages from Great Northern headquarters sent over the railroad wires telling them to report to work.

"Sit down there and tell them yourself, Mr. Debs," said Hill.

All that night Gene sat in his shirt sleeves dictating orders in A. R. U. code to Hill's telegraphers. The key men talked back and forth clear to the Coast. One division point reported:

> The whole town is drunk and celebrating. Will be ready for duty in the morning.*

The next morning Gene and Theodore started back to Terre Haute. They noticed that their train was merely crawling through the yards. Theodore stepped out onto the rear platform. Then he called quietly to his brother.

Gene clutched Theodore's shoulder hard when he saw the reason for the slow progress of the train. On either side of the tracks the maintenance-men were standing, hats off, heads bowed. It was the tribute of these workers to the man who had won for them a little better chance for life. They had asked the engineer of Gene's train to go slowly through the yards. They knew Gene would understand that they could give him nothing—for they had so little—nothing but that silent expression of devotion.

Yelling railroaders milled around the Terre Haute depot when Gene and Theodore dropped wearily off the train. They had a carriage and were all for taking out the horses and dragging the brothers in triumph through the

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* Eugene V. Debs in *The Comrade,* June, 1904, p. 188.

streets. But Gene would have none of this. He and Theodore legged it at the head of an exultant parade to the Eighth Street home where Katherine was waiting. Pretty soon Gene came out to look across the heads of the crowd jamming the streets all about. He was thinking of his rank and file when he said:

> My glory, my friends, consists in the gladness which I know will be brought into the little cottage homes of the humble trackmen among the hills in the West. I can almost see the looks of gratitude on the faces of these men's wives and little children. In all my life I have never felt so highly honored as I did when leaving St. Paul on my way home. . . .*

* *Debs—Authorized Life and Letters,* David Karsner, page 136.

CHAPTER IX

"THE DEBS REBELLION"

THE Reverend Dr. Oggel went into the pulpit of the Green Stone Presbyterian Church at Pullman, Ill., to take for the text of his sermon, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor."

When it finally developed that Dr. Oggel had in mind the crowning of none other than George M. Pullman, a cabinetmaker who had been working for Mr. Pullman's company for ten hours a day at a per diem wage of $1.50, fumbled under the pew for his hat and went clumping wearily down the middle aisle followed by the scandalized glances of the wives of the foremen.

Somehow this tired man, standing in the church vestibule and looking about him at the imposing front of that "model town" which the palace car magnate had set up for his workers outside Chicago, could not reconcile George M. Pullman's activities with the glory and honor accorded those but little lower than angels.

To be sure, there was the urbane Colonel Duane Doty, official welcomer and guide for visitors, who exclaimed over the beauties of Pullman as seen from the steps of the Presbyterian Church. In the *Pullman Journal* Colonel Doty was writing about Pullman as "a town from which all that is ugly and discordant and demoralizing is eliminated, and which was built as the solution of the industrial problem

based upon the idea of mutual recognition." * And there was the "Arcade Row" with its block of pretty nine-room cottages and the public library with no less than 2,073 books of poetry and the opera house and the Y. M. C. A. and the hotel which had been blessed by Frances E. Willard for its refusal to serve intoxicating beverages to workers. (Salaried officials were served in their rooms.)

But there was also Fulton Street with its three-story tenement blocks lettered from A to J. From 300 to 500 Pullman workers and their families lived there under one roof. There the foreign-born workers lived in apartments of two, three, and four rooms with one water-faucet and one toilet to be shared by five families.

And there were the "brickyards" at the south of the town where marched bleak rows of wooden shanties, sixteen by twenty feet, which were built at a cost of $100 apiece, and were rented by Mr. Pullman's company for $96 a year.

In the center of the town were the shops where 4,000 Pullman employees, cabinetmakers, steamfitters, blacksmiths, upholsterers, car-builders, painters, finishers worked at wages in many instances one-half of those paid to mechanics in Chicago.

At the time that Dr. Oggel was glorifying Mr. Pullman and Col. Doty was writing: "It (the town of Pullman) has illustrated the helpful combination of capital and labor without strife or stultification, upon lines of mutual recognition"—the wages of all Pullman employees under the rank of foremen were being cut from 33 to 50 per cent, while rents and gas and water rates, taken out of the employees' pay envelopes by the company, remained the same.

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* *The Pullman Strike,* Rev. Wm. H. Carwardine, page 19.

The official explanation for the cut was the 1893 depression. From November on, following a period of bustling activity in all the shops, men were laid off, wages were slashed to the bone and when the spring of 1894 came, the Pullman workers were in debt to the company to the extent of more than $70,000.

Men found themselves at the end of two weeks' work in the shops with but from four cents to two dollars of actual cash in their envelopes. The rest had been "checked off" by the company. And this, in spite of the fact that the company was making comfortable profits throughout the depressed period.

The cabinetmaker who walked out on the Reverend Dr. Oggel found that he was not alone in his disgust with what another and a very different parson from Dr. Oggel —the Rev. William Carwardine—called: "a civilized relic of European serfdom." All through Fulton Street and the brickyards, men, women and children were muttering against their common foe, the company. Dr. Carwardine, who was pastor of the First Methodist Church at Pullman, and a singularly outspoken man in a community where it paid to keep one's mouth shut, wrote: "An unpleasant feature of the town is that you are made to feel at every turn the presence of the corporation. As Peter Quinon, of the *Pittsburg Times,* well says:

> The corporation is everything and everywhere. The corporation trims your lawn and attends to your trees; the corporation sweeps your street, and sends a man around to pick up every cigar stump, every bit of paper, every straw or leaf; the corporation puts two barrels in your back yard, one for ashes and one for refuse from the kitchen; the corporation has the ashes and refuse hauled away; the corporation provides you new barrels when the others are worn out; the corporation does

> practically everything but sweep your room and make your bed, and the corporation expects you to enjoy it and hold your tongue.

This is a corporation-made and a corporation-governed town, and is utterly un-American in its tendencies." *

In the spring, at that time of year when restless workers have a way of striking, the cabinetmaker and some other intrepid souls got together in a hall at Kensington, the adjoining town to Pullman where, within a few minutes' walk from the dry hotel, the thirsty could find thirty-five saloons for their refreshment. There they organized a union. They looked over possible sources of help from the outside world and decided that the one most likely organization they could call on was the American Railway Union.

Gene had hardly caught up with the sleep he had lost in St. Paul when a group of Pullman workers stamped up on the porch of the Terre Haute house, begging Gene to come up to Pullman and look over "the model town."

Gene and Howard met the workers in Kensington and both men urged that there be no thought of a strike until every way to arbitration was explored. "Wait until the American Railway Union is stronger, better disciplined," said Gene in effect, "and then we'll come in if you want us."

Gene knew that here was a far more serious matter than the headlong campaign against Hill. If the American Railway Union was to help the sweated Pullman workers, it meant the calling of a sympathetic strike, something dangerously suggesting, in the minds of the public at any rate, the "upheavals" of 1877. He did not feel that one

* *The Pullman Strike,* Rev. Wm. H. Carwardine, page 24.

victory, no matter how brilliant, was enough to give his rank and file the status of veterans. This was a battle from which he had best stand apart during the formative period of the American Railway Union.

The Pullman workers listened to his pleas for arbitration respectfully enough. All right, they would try arbitration. They sent a committee to confer with the company representatives in Chicago. The committeemen were told to come back a week later when Mr. Pullman would have a statement. On the appointed day a clerk read Mr. Pullman's statement to the effect that he would not grant a restoration of the wage scale of the early part of 1893 because he couldn't afford it. He would show them the books. Gene urged the workers to go back with some of the town officials. They were told there could be no conference with "outsiders." Finally a committee consisting only of Pullman employees went to Chicago and this time Pullman abruptly turned them out with a tart: "There is nothing to arbitrate."

On May 11, 1894, the workers came out of the shops. It was from the beginning a one-hundred per cent walkout. The workers stayed in their standardized barracks refusing to enter a single Pullman factory.

Gene and Howard found them stubbornly determined to fight it out on that line. Again the Pullman strike committee sent an official call to the American Railway Union.

Gene, with leaden heart and a brooding premonition of disaster, stood up before a hastily called convention of the railroaders at Uhlich's Hall in Chicago. He outlined the situation. He said flatly that he was opposed to the American Railway Union going in. He gave the four hundred delegates a picture of the forces which would move against

them if they voted to boycott Pullman cars as the striking car builders were urging. There was a tenseness in the air when he was done. Debs then called on Dr. Carwardine, a mild mannered little man, the last in the world one would expect to deliver, under the very noses of company officials, so fierce a philippic as he had hurled from his pulpit against Pullman a few weeks before. The parson took the railroaders behind the scenes at Pullman. He gave them human, understandable touches of what it meant to live beneath the shadows of the company. The convention cheered him sympathetically, but it was a woman who finally won them over. Jennie Curtiss, who had worked for Pullman in the sewing rooms for the past five years, went up on the platform in front of Gene, and said: "My father worked for the Pullman Company for ten years. Last summer he was sick for three months, and in September he died. At the time of his death we owed the Pullman Company about $60 for rent. I was working at the time, and they told me I would have to pay that rent, give what I could every pay day until it was paid. I did not say I would not pay, but thought rather than be thrown out of work I would pay it. Many a time I have drawn nine and ten dollars for two weeks' work, paid $7 for my board and given the company the remaining two or three dollars on the rent, and I still owe them $15. Sometimes when I could not possibly give them anything the clerks in the bank would insult me because Mr. Pullman would not give me enough in return for my hard labor to pay the rent for one of his houses and live."

Carwardine said that his people, with little relief coming in from the outside, were on the verge of starvation. Jennie Curtiss said "we ask you men to come along with us because

we are fighting not just for ourselves, but for decent conditions for workers everywhere." Those two speeches were enough for the delegates. They promptly voted $2,000 from the union treasury for funds for the immediate relief for the Pullman strikers, and on June 26, 1894, the newspapers of the country had headlines announcing that a boycott on Pullman palace cars had been declared by the year-old American Railway Union.

"The times are revolutionary," exclaimed John Swinton in the East, when he read the news. "The energies of mankind in our day are immense. There is an extraordinary activity of the powers of life in our age. The world seems to be whirling more rapidly than ever before. Vast changes have been brought about in our generation; others are in progress; yet others are impending. There is a new spirit abroad, and its manifestations are everywhere. 'Things are in the saddle.' Questions from which there can be no escape are before us."

Debs, bowing to the decision of his followers, took off his coat and entered into what he knew was to be the most desperate struggle of his life. From the Chicago headquarters of the A. R. U. he sent telegrams to his organizers at every division point, ordering them to instruct the rank and file of the membership to refuse to pull Pullman cars on their trains. By noon of the 26th he was beginning to get returns.

There was some confusion at first as to the exact tactics to be employed in the cutting off of the Pullmans. In their enthusiasm many train crews simply abandoned Pullmans on sidings and left the forlorn passengers to fend for themselves. But everywhere they responded to Gene's order. By the third day of the boycott, reporters emerging

from the confusion of Gene's headquarters, filled with excited railroaders all insistent on seeing Gene at one and the same time, estimated that 40,000 railroaders, the great majority on lines west of Chicago, were participating in the boycott.

By now the affair progressed far beyond the mere boycotting of Pullman cars. The constitution of the A. R. U. provided that a strike could be declared by a majority vote of the employees of a railroad. In their lodges A. R. U. members called separate strikes on the various roads where they were employed, and sent exultant word to Chicago that one line after another was being tied up.

The next day bulletins from headquarters stated that 125,000 railroad workers on twenty roads were on strike. Gene was sending telegrams ordering his men to "refrain from any act of violence or depredation and from any interference with the affairs of the several companies involved." Now came Grand Master Workman J. R. Sovereign of the Knights of Labor, Powderly's successor, pledging the support of his order to the strike, and from the trade and labor organizations of Chicago with a membership of 150,000 the offer to call a general strike in the city if necessary to enforce the boycott.

Gene and Theodore went from conferences at strike headquarters to jammed meetings at Uhlich's Hall passing newsboys holding up latest editions of the paper with the name "Debs" in towering type. Gene read that militia were being sent into Cairo, Ill., at the request of the local authorities there. He didn't like the looks of that, but he knew that he could count on Governor John P. Altgeld * of

* Of Altgeld, Debs wrote: "He was genuine, he was true, he could look God and man straight in the eye."

Illinois to see to it that the bluecoats did not exceed their authority.

It was comforting to Gene to think that Altgeld down at Springfield was not the sort to be swept off his feet by any yelpings from strike-breaking officials. Gene knew that here was one man high in public life who could not be touched by the far-flung influence of any corporation. Altgeld held the view, peculiar among governors, that it was his business to use the militia not for the purpose of terrorizing strikers, but to protect property and preserve order. On the desk in the office of the tragic little figure in Springfield telegrams from all parts of the State denouncing the strikers were heaped high. But Altgeld, from the very outset of the strike, had been in close contact with the situation. Whatever he thought of the Pullman Company methods, and he was later to express his thoughts in no uncertain terms, he could not show any favoritism. While in his heart he sympathized with the strikers, he did his full duty as governor of the State of Illinois. Henry Demarest Lloyd, the foremost liberal of his day, writing of Altgeld's conduct in the first days of the strike, said: "I happened to be in Springfield at the time of the strike, and spent an evening with Governor Altgeld. He entertained me in the Executive Office and showed me a huge map of Illinois on which was marked, with tacks and pins, the position of every company of militia, while a great sheet lay on the desk showing exactly what companies were under arms, what railroads would be most efficient in taking them to Chicago, and what provisions were made for sustenance. The governor had the troops of the whole state practically under arms, and ready to throw into Chicago, when request should be made for them."

2

To the tune of *Upidee*, the railroaders in Uhlich's Hall bellowed the fighting song of the A. R. U.:

The Union train is coming fast
chuca, choo, chuca, choo!
She's humming down the line, at last,
chuca, choo, chuca, choo!
Then blow the whistle, clear the track—
You'd better stand a little back.

(CHORUS)

Chuca, chuca, chuca, choo!
A. R. U.—Who are you?
Chuca, chuca, chuca, choo!
We are A. R. U. Hoo-o-!
Choo-choo-choo-choo-ss-ding-choo!
Chuca, chuca, chuca, choo!
A. R. U.—Who are you,
We are A. R. U.—Are you?
Choo! ss—ding—Hoo-o-o!

Our engineer is E. V. Debs,
On him there are no spider webs;
And no one, now, the fact denies,
That on our union are no flies."

Their defiant voices were drowned in the crescendo of fear arising from every privileged center in America. Here and there to be sure men kept their heads. The realistic Mark Hanna, who had compared Pullman's "model" town to a backhouse,* snarled: "A man who won't meet his men halfway is a God-damn fool." Ambrose Bierce said: "Mr. Pullman is a gentlemen—in the American sense—he bathes

* *Hanna*, Thomas Beer, page 133.

and has never been in jail." Eugene Field, who had met Debs the year before and been instantly captivated, wrote sturdily in defense of Gene and his strikers. Henry Demarest Lloyd and a scattering of well-to-do liberals came to Gene with offers of aid. From Hull House, Jane Addams sent cheering word to Gene. But in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and in Washington, most especially in Washington, men grew purple under their jaws when they spoke of Debs.

They sat outside Grover Cleveland's office, bankers, speculators, railroad directors, newspaper editors, waiting their turn to tell the President what to do to this "anarchist Debs." Cleveland, with the echoes of the crash of 1893 still sounding in his ears, unhappy, beset, rolled his worried eyes from one to the other of his suppliants. As they pounded his desk, he shuffled papers irresolutely. They shrilled their demands for troops. He muttered something about receiving no requests for troops from Altgeld. "Altgeld!" exclaimed the frightened men. "Why he's hand-in-glove with Debs." Cleveland looked miserable.

On the morning of July 4th, Gene was awakened by the sound of military commands in the street beneath the window of his hotel on Jackson Street, Chicago. Gene went to the window and looked down. Men in blue uniforms were stacking rifles in a courtyard. "Come here, Theodore," Gene said. "Those fellers aren't militiamen. They're regulars, Theodore, they're regulars. Do you get that? Cleveland has sent the troops in."

The brothers stared at each other. Gene sent for the morning papers. There it was, "Troops Sent to Quell Rioting," "Cleveland Acts," "Civil War?"

The frightened men in Washington had won. Cleveland,

THE TROOPS ARRIVE AT CHICAGO, 1894

Members of Co. A and Co. C from Fort Sheridan at Union Depot

after a short consultation with Richard Olney, his Secretary of State, formerly chief counsel for the Erie Railroad, had ordered a regiment of regulars, the Fifteenth Infantry, to proceed to Chicago. At the same time, according to Swinton, Cleveland gave the newspapermen to understand that he was "ready to concentrate, not only the regiments of the regular army, but also all available State troops in Chicago, to disregard State lines for military purposes, and to use the National Guard of other States in the State of Illinois or anywhere else."

Under command of General Nelson A. Miles, a romantically mustachioed warrior, famed for his campaign against Geronimo, the Apache, the troops arrived from Fort Sheridan. The small boys of Chicago foreswore even the attractions of Fourth of July firecrackers at the sight of the uniforms. They followed the soldiers with delight. But from tenement house windows and over the tops of swinging doors by the stockyards, men watched the marching troops through narrowed eyes. The women frankly jeered.

At strike headquarters Gene telegraphed his lieutenants to warn their men to avoid any clash with the troops.

At Springfield, Altgeld, his every democratic instinct outraged by this brusque invasion of States' rights, sent the following telegram to the White House:

Hon. Grover Cleveland,
President United States,
Washington.

Sir:

I am advised that you have ordered Federal troops into service in the State of Illinois. Surely the facts have not been correctly presented to you in the case, or you would not have taken this step, for it is entirely unnecessary, and, as it seems to me, unjustifiable. Waiving all questions of courtesy, I will

say that the State of Illinois is not only able to take care of itself, but stands ready today to furnish the Federal Government any assistance it may need elsewhere. Our military force is ample, and consists of as good soldiers as can be found in the country. They have been ordered out promptly whenever and wherever they were needed.

We have stationed in Chicago alone three regiments of infantry, one battery, and one troop of cavalry, and no better soldiers can be found. They have been ready every moment for duty, and are eager to go into service. But they have not been ordered out, because nobody in Cook County, whether official or private citizen, asked to have their assistance, or even intimated in any way that it was desired or necessary.

So far as I am advised, the local officials have been able to handle the situation. But if any assistance were needed, the State stood ready to furnish one hundred men for every one man required, and stood ready to do so at a moment's notice.

Notwithstanding these facts, the Federal Government has been applied to by men who had political and selfish motives for wanting to ignore the State Government. We have just gone through a long coal strike more extensive here than in any other State, because our soft coal field is larger than that of any other State. We have not had ten days of the railroad strike, and we have promptly furnished military aid wherever the local officials needed it.

In two instances the United States Marshal for the southern district of Illinois applied for assistance to enable him to enforce the processes of the United States Court, and troops were promptly furnished him, and he was assisted in every way he desired. The law has been thoroughly executed, and every man guilty of violating it during the strike has been brought to justice. If the marshals for the northern district of Illinois, or the authorities of Cook County, needed military assistance, they had but to ask for it to get it from the State.

At present some of our railroads are paralyzed, not by reason of obstructions, but because they cannot get men to operate their trains. For some reason they are anxious to keep this fact from the public, and for this purpose are making an outcry about obstructions in order to divert attention. I will cite to you two examples which illustrate the situation:

Some days ago I was advised that the business of one of our

railroads was obstructed at two railroad centres, that there was a condition bordering on anarchy there, and was asked to furnish protection so as to enable the employes of the road to operate the trains. Troops were promptly ordered to both points. Then it transpired that the company had not sufficient men on its line to operate one train. All the old hands were orderly, but refused to work. The company had large shops in which were a number of men who did not belong to the railway union, but who could run an engine. They were appealed to to run the train, but flatly refused. We were obliged to hunt up soldiers who could run an engine and operate a train.

Again, two days ago, appeals which were almost frantic came from officials of another road, stating that at an important point on their line trains were forcibly obstructed, and that there was a reign of anarchy at that place, and they asked for protection. Troops were put on the ground in a few hours' time, when the officer in command telegraphed me that there was no trouble, and had been none at that point, but that the road seemed to have no men to run trains; and the sheriff telegraphed that he did not need troops, but would himself move every train if the company would only furnish an engineer. The result was that the troops were there over twelve hours before a single train was moved, although there was no attempt at interference by anybody.

It is true that in several instances when a road made efforts to work a few green men, a crowd standing around scoffed at them and tried to drive them away, and that in a few other cases Pullman sleepers were cut from trains. But all these troubles were local in character and could easily be handled by the State authorities.

Illinois has more railroad men than any other State in the Union, and as a rule they are orderly and well-behaved. This is shown by the fact that so very little actual violence has been committed. Only a very small per cent of these men have been guilty of any infractions of the law. The newspaper accounts have in some cases been pure fabrications and in others wild exaggerations.

I have gone thus into details to show that it is not soldiers that the railroads need so much as it is men to operate trains. The conditions do not exist here which bring the case within the Federal statute, a statute that was passed in 1861, which

was in reality a war measure. This statute authorized the use of Federal troops in a State "whenever it shall be impracticable to enforce the laws of the United States within such States by the ordinary judicial process."

Such a condition does not exist in Illinois. There have been a few local disturbances, but nothing that seriously interfered with the administration of law or justice, or that could not easily be controlled by the local or State authorities, for the Federal troops can do nothing that the State troops cannot do.

I repeat that you have been imposed upon in this matter. Even if, by a forced construction, it were held that the conditions here came within the letter of the statute, then I submit that local self-government is a fundamental principle of our Constitution. Each community shall govern itself so long as it can and is ready to enforce the law; and it is in harmony with this fundamental principle that the statute authorizing the President to send troops into States must be construed. Especially is this so in matters relating to the exercise of the police power and preservation of law and order.

To absolutely ignore a local government in matters of this kind, when that government is ready to furnish any assistance needed, and is amply able to enforce the law, not only insults the people of the State by imputing to them an inability to govern themselves or unwillingness to enforce the law, but is in violation of a basic principle of our institutions. The question of Federal supremacy is in no way involved. No one disputes it for a moment, but under our Constitution Federal supremacy and local self-government must go hand-in-hand, and to ignore the latter is to do violence to the Constitution.

As Governor of the State of Illinois, I protest against this, and ask the immediate withdrawal of the Federal troops from active duty in this State. Should the situation at any time get so serious that we cannot control it with the State forces, we shall promptly and freely ask for Federal assistance. Until such time, I protest, with all due deference, against this uncalled for reflection upon our people, and I again ask the immediate withdrawal of these troops.

I have the honor to be

Yours respectfully,
JOHN P. ALTGELD,
Governor of Illinois.

President Cleveland replied immediately to this protest in these terms:

Executive Mansion,
Washington, D. C.,
July 5, 1894.

John P. Altgeld,
Governor of Illinois.

Federal troops were sent to Chicago in strict accordance with the Constitution and laws of the United States upon the demand of the Post Office Department that obstruction of the mails should be removed, and upon the representations of the judicial officers of the United States that process of the Federal Courts could not be executed through the ordinary means, and upon abundant proof that conspiracies existed against commerce between the States.

To meet these conditions, which are clearly within the province of Federal authority, the presence of Federal troops in the city of Chicago was deemed not only proper but necessary, and there has been no intention of thereby interfering with the the plain duty of the local authorities to preserve the peace of the city.

GROVER CLEVELAND.

The next day Governor Altgeld again addressed the President:

Your answer to my protest involves some startling conclusions, and evades the question at issue, which is that the principle of local self-government is just as fundamental in our institutions as is that of Federal supremacy.

1st. You calmly assume that the Executive has the legal right to order Federal troops into any community of the United States, in the first instance, whenever there is the slightest disturbance, and that he can do this without any regard to the question as to whether that community is able and ready to enforce the law itself. Inasmuch as the Executive is the sole judge of the question as to whether any disturbance exists or not in any part of the country, this assumption means that the Executive can send Federal troops into any community in the

United States at his pleasure, and keep them there as long as he chooses.

If this is the law, then the principle of local self-government either never did exist in this country or else has been destroyed, for no community can be said to possess local self-government if the Executive can, at his pleasure, send military forces to patrol it under pretence of enforcing some law. The kind of local self-government that could exist under these circumstances may be found in any of the monarchies of Europe. It is not in harmony with the spirit of our institutions.

2nd. It is also a fundamental principle in our Government that, except in times of war, the military shall be subordinate to the civil authorities. In harmony with this provision, the State troops, when ordered out, act under and with the civil authorities. The Federal troops you have ordered to Chicago are not under the civil authorities, and are in no way responsible to them for their conduct. They are not even acting under the United States Marshal, or under any Federal officer of the State, but are acting directly under military orders issued from military headquarters at Washington, and, in so far as these troops act at all it is military Government.

3rd. The statute authorizing Federal troops to be sent into States, in certain cases, contemplates that the State troops shall be used first. This provision has been ignored, and it is assumed that the Executive is not bound by it. Federal interference with industrial disturbances in the various States is certainly a new departure, and it opens up so large a field that it will require a very little stretch of authority to absorb to itself all the details of local Government.

4th. You say that troops were ordered into Illinois upon the demand of the Post Office Department and upon representations of the judicial officers of the United States that process of court could not be served, and upon proof that conspiracies existed. We will not discuss the facts, but look for a moment at the principle involved in your statement.

All of these officers are appointed by the Executive. Most of them can be removed by him at will. They are not only obliged to do his bidding, but they are, in fact, a part of the Executive. If several of them can apply for troops, one alone can; so that under the law as you assume it to be, an Executive, through any one of his appointees, can apply to himself to have

the military sent into any city or number of cities, and base his application on such representation or showing as he sees fit to make.

In fact, it will be immaterial whether he makes any showing or not, for the Executive is the sole judge, and nobody else has any right to interfere or even inquire about it. Then the Executive can pass on his own application—his will being the sole guide—he can hold the application to be sufficient, and can order troops to as many places as he wishes, put them in command of any one he chooses, and have them act, not under the civil officers, either Federal or State, but act directly under military orders from Washington; and there is not in the Constitution or laws of the land, whether written or unwritten, any limitation or restraint upon his power. His judgment—that is, his will, is the sole guide, and, it being purely a matter of discretion, his decision can never be examined or questioned.

This assumption as to the power of the Executive is certainly new, and I respectfully submit that it is not the law of the land. The jurists have told us that this is a Government of law, not a Government by the caprice of individuals, and, further, that, instead of being autocratic, it was a Government of limited power. Yet the autocrat of Russia could certainly not possess or claim to possess greater power than is possessed by the Executive of the United States, if your assumption is correct.

5th. The Executive has the command not only of the regular forces of the United States, but of the military forces of all the States, and can order them to any place he sees fit to; and as there are always more or less local disturbances in the country, it will be an easy matter, under your construction of the law, for an ambitious Executive to order out the military forces of all of the States and establish at once a military Government.

The only chance of failure in such a movement could come from rebellion, and with such a vast military power at command this could readily be crushed, for, as a rule, soldiers obey orders.

As for the situation in Illinois, that is of no consequence when compared with the far-reaching principles involved. True, according to my advices, Federal troops have not been on duty for over two days, and although the men were brave and the officers valiant and able, yet their very presence proved to be an irritant, because it aroused the indignation of a large class of people who, while upholding law and order, had been taught

to believe in local self-government, and therefore resented what they regarded as an unwarrantable interference.

Inasmuch as the Federal troops can do nothing but what the State troops can do here, and believing that the State is amply able to take care of the situation and to enforce the law, and believing that the ordering out of the Federal troops was unwarranted, I again ask their withdrawal.

JOHN P. ALTGELD.

Curtly, Cleveland answered:—

While I am still persuaded that I have neither transcended my authority nor duty in the emergency that confronts us, it seems to me that in this hour of danger and public distress discussion may well give way to active effort on the part of all in authority to restore obedience to law and to protect life and property.

GROVER CLEVELAND.

Now from all sides they were closing in on Gene, those ponderous forces which swing into action at the command of endangered property. He could deny that any of his men were in the crowds which almost daily came into bloody collision with the troops and some three thousand deputies, sworn in by Federal marshals and armed with high-powered rifles. It availed him nothing. In the public's view of things Eugene Victor Debs was the one man responsible for the guerilla warfare between regulars and mobs at the stockyards which began the moment the troops encamped. It was Debs and his "anarchist bands" who were back of the sanguinary business at Hammond, Ind., where five persons were killed in a wild charge of regulars into a crowd of 1,000. Let Debs appeal, as he did, to Cleveland for fair play. Let Sovereign of the Knights wire Washington denouncing the recklessness of the troops. It made no difference. The only response to come from Cleveland

was more troops backed by a Presidential proclamation that there would be "no hesitation or vacillation in the decisive treatment of the guilty."

At the instigation of Secretary of State Olney, Federal Judges William A. Woods and Peter S. Grosscup of the Northern District of Illinois issued "against President Debs and others" an injunction forbidding Gene, Howard, Keliher and the fourteen directors of the American Railway Union "from in any way or manner interfering with, hindering, obstructing, or stopping" any of the business of a list of twenty-one roads from the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe to the Wabash.

The injunction invoked the Sherman Anti-Trust act, passed in 1890, forbidding combinations in restraint of trade or commerce among States. For the first time it became evident to labor that the Anti-Trust law had teeth bared against combinations of workers as well as business men. It was not until the passage of the Clayton act in 1914 that labor succeeded in gaining any measure of immunity from prosecution under the Sherman act. And even the Clayton act, hailed by Gompers as "Labor's Magna Charta," has not served to clarify the injunction situation. A struggle of far-flung dimensions was begun with the issuance of the Debs injunction.

The strikers called it a "gatling gun on paper" and it was that in fact, aimed straight at the heart of the strike. The "thread" that was begun at Denver in Buchanan's strike was weaving fast. From time to time since the Southwestern strikes the threat of injunction had been held over the heads of labor men. But it was still a new thing under the sun of American jurisprudence. Even the most conservative lawyers gagged at the idea of giving the courts such

arbitrary power as the issuing of injunctions against labor would imply. There was always the danger that the thing might turn out to be a boomerang. That labor in power might use the injunctive process for its own ends.

Again a considerable and eminently respectable body of opinion held that the injunction could be nothing more than a warning issued by the court to prevent acts which are contrary to law *per se;* and if this were the case, what was the necessity for this formal document couched in intimidating and mystifying terms? Such firm defenders of the status quo as the *Springfield Republican* and the *New York Evening Post* held this view. Of course, the Liberals of that time, far more influential than their present day successors, stood to a man against the issuing of any injunctions whatsoever in labor disputes, holding that it was an unheard of invasion of civil rights. There is a reflection of this liberal attack on injunctions in a heated pamphlet written by Edgar Lee Masters, called *The New Star Chamber.*

Nevertheless, there was the gatling gun. Labor's lawyers might cry out against "the prostitution of the government to the service of capitalists," the Constitution might be indignantly invoked by libertarians. There was the gatling gun.

And back of it, an organization hitherto pretty much of a mystery to the general public—the General Managers' Association. This was an offensive and defensive federation formed in 1886 not of railroad employees of the sort which Debs had urged, but of their bosses. In it were officials of every road terminating in Chicago. Unlike the American Railway Union, whose meetings were open, the General Managers met behind closed doors and rigidly excluded newspapermen. By July 4th, however, the association was

so generally recognized as being in command of the struck railways that the Chicago municipal authorities sought a conference with its representatives. These overtures were brusquely rejected. The association was sitting more comfortable now that the troops were in and the injunction notice served on Debs.

Gene had plenty to do, besides reading verbose and menacing court orders. He threw the paper on his desk and went on about the business of sending telegrams to division points, listening to reports of men come in from the field, giving interviews to reporters, seeking out every possible source of labor and liberal assistance.

Samuel Gompers, with a peremptory telegram in his pocket from the unions in Chicago telling him that it was his duty to be at the "storm center" of the strike, arrived in town to call a general conference of the trades-unions and the brotherhoods.

Gene came to that conference, made what Gompers described as "a calm but eloquent statement" and then read a proposition which he wished Gompers to submit to the general managers. This was nothing more drastic than a demand for the reinstatement of the American Railway Union strikers. But, according to Gompers, in his statement made after the strike, written for Swinton's book *Striking for Life*, "thereafter a general discussion ensued as to the advisability of recommending a general strike of the organized workingmen of America."

Gompers saw that the strike was faltering. The victorious pace of the first days had been slowed up by the presence of the regulars and the injunction. Gompers, since the days of the cigar-makers' strikes, had no heart for prolonged fighting. He broke out in sweat at the thought of

a general strike. He used all the weapons in his arsenal of persuasion to head off this "madness." And at the end, he came out of the conference with the following statement, as illuminating a presentation of the underlying philosophy of the A. F. of L., then and now, as can be found:

> The great industrial upheaval now agitating the country has been carefully, calmly, and fully considered in a conference of the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor, and the executive officers and representatives of the National and International Unions and Brotherhoods of Railway men, called to meet in Chicago, 12th of July, 1894. In the light of all the evidence obtainable, and in view of the peculiar complications now enveloping the situation, we are forced to the conclusion that the best interests of the unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor demand that they refrain from participating in any general or local strike which may be proposed in connection with the present railroad troubles.
>
> In making this declaration, we do not wish it understood that we are in any way antagonistic to labor organizations now struggling for right or justice, but rather that the present contest has become surrounded and beset with complications so grave in their nature that we cannot consistently advise a course which would but add to the general confusion.
>
> The public press, ever alive to the interests of corporate wealth, have, with few exceptions, so maliciously misrepresented matters that in the public mind the working classes are now arrayed in open hostility to Federal authority. This is a position we do not wish to be placed in, nor will we occupy it without a protest.
>
> We claim to be as patriotic and law-abiding as any other class of citizens, a claim substantiated by our action in times of public need and peril.
>
> By misrepresentation and duplicity certain corporations assume that they stand for law and order, and that those opposing them represent lawlessness and anarchy. We protest against this assumption, as we protest against the inference that, because a certain individual or a certain class enjoy a monopoly in particular lines of trade or commerce, it necessarily follows that they are entitled to a monopoly of loyalty and good citizenship.

The trade-union movement is one of reason, one of deliberation, depending entirely upon the voluntary and sovereign action of its members. It is democratic in principle and action, conservative in its demands, and consistent in its efforts to secure them.

Industrial contests cannot be entered into at the behest of any individual officer of this conference, regardless of the position he may occupy in our organizations. Strikes in our affiliated organizations are entered into only as a last resort, and after all efforts for a peaceful adjustment of grievances have failed, and then only after the members have by their own votes (usually requiring a two-thirds and often a three-fourths vote) so decided.

The trade-union movement has its origin in economic and social injustice, and has its history, its struggles, and its tendency well defined. It stands as the protector of those who see the wrongs and injustice resultant of our present industrial system, and who, by organization, manifest their purpose of becoming larger sharers in the product of their labor, and who, by their efforts, contribute towards securing the unity and solidarity of labor's forces; so that in the ever-present contest of the wealth-producers to conquer their rights from the wealth-absorbers, we may by our intelligence and persistency, the earnestness of our purpose, the nobility of our cause, work out through evolutionary methods the final emancipation of labor.

While we may not have the power to order a strike of the working people of our country, we are fully aware that a recommendation from this conference to them to lay down their tools of labor would largely influence the members of our affiliated organizations; and appreciating the responsibility resting upon us and the duty we owe to all, we declare it to be the sense of this conference that a general strike at this time is inexpedient, unwise, and contrary to the best interests of the working people. We further recommend that all connected with the American Federation of Labor now out on sympathetic strike should return to work, and those who contemplate going out on sympathetic strike are advised to remain at their usual vocations.

In this strike of the American Railway Union we recognize an impulsive vigorous protest against the gathering, growing forces of plutocratic power and corporation rule. In the sympathetic movement of that order to help the Pullman employes,

they have demonstrated the hollow shams of Pullman's pharisaical paradise. Mr. Pullman, in his persistent repulses of arbitration and in his heartless, autocratic treatment of his employes, has proven himself a public enemy.

The heart of labor everywhere throbs responsive to the manly purposes and sturdy struggle of the American Railway Union in their heroic endeavor to redress the wrongs of the Pullman employes. In this position they effectually reiterate the fundamental trade-union principle that working people, regardless of sex, creed, color, nationality, politics, or occupation, should have one and the same interest in one common cause for their own industrial and political advancement.

By this railway strike the people are once more reminded of the immense forces held at the call of corporate capital for the subjugation of labor. For years the railroad interests have shown the lawless example of defiance to injunctions, and have set aside laws to control them. They have displayed the utmost contempt for the interstate commerce law, have avoided its penalties and sneered at its impotency to prevent pooling discriminations and other impositions on the public. In this disregard of law these corporations have given the greatest impetus to anarchy and lawlessness. Still they did not hesitate, when confronted by outraged labor, to invoke the powers of the state. The Federal Government, backed by United States Marshals, injunctions of courts, proclamations by the President, and sustained by the bayonets of soldiers and all the civil and military machinery of the law, have rallied on the summons of the corporations.

Against this array of armed force and brutal moneyed aristocracy, would it not be worse than folly to call men out on a general or local strike in these days of stagnant trade and commercial depression? No, better, let us organize more generally, combine more closely, unite our forces, educate and prepare ourselves to protect our interests, that we may go to the ballot-box and cast our votes as American freemen, united and determined to redeem this country from its present political and industrial misrule, to take it from the hands of the plutocratic wreckers and place it in the hands of the common people.

Newsboys, wearing in their buttonholes the white ribbons which the strikers had adopted as their official badge,

were throwing papers denouncing Debs into the gutter.

A devil-may-care engineer dropped, one night, over the high embankment surrounding the Illinois Central Yards to land behind a startled special constable. Waving a piece of paper (it was a laundry bill), the striker said sharply: "I'm from the office. I have orders here to spike the switches in this yard. We hear the strikers are coming over and that they are going to try to derail some trains. You come along with me and help." He led the constable to a tool box, and for a busy night the sweating officer laden with a bucket of spikes and a heavy maul ran up and down the yard spiking every switch to the yard limit under the stern direction of the engineer. It took two days to undo this work.

But, on the whole, the strikers kept almost ostentatiously away from the yards, and the derailing of trains and the burning of freight cars was carried on mainly by desperados who had no connection with any labor organization. A single shot fired by a nervous sentry was sufficient to bring to the scene hundreds of unemployed men ready to hurl epithets and bricks. Every such incident was magnified a thousandfold by the time the report of it was placed on wires leading to Eastern papers, and if the children then growing up in New York, Philadelphia and Boston still associate in their latter days the name of Eugene Victor Debs with flaming torches, plunging daggers and all the impedimenta of violence, it is simply proof of how ably the propagandists for the General Managers' Association did their job.*

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* S. A. de Witt, socialist poet, editor and campaigner, remembers participating in a New York school debate in the late '90's in which he argued that Debs was an "anarchist and the most dangerous man in the country."

And now with Debs, was linked John P. Altgeld, pacing the executive offices in Springfield in black despair over what he saw as the brutal rape of all that his democratic spirit held dear. "Altgeld," said *Harper's Weekly*, "the most dangerous enemy to American institutions of all the ruffianly gang which has broken out of the forecastle of the Ship of State and attempted to occupy the quarter deck and seize the helm." Altgeld, "eagle forgotten," who had committed the unpardonable crime of pardoning the Haymarket anarchists, Fielden, Neebe and Schwab, now shared with Gene the contumely of "the respectable element of the nation." In Altgeld's case it was harder to bear than in Gene's, for with the exception of a few friends, the little Governor was isolate, whereas Gene moved constantly amid the warming loyalty of his rank and file. Historians of the future have a long over-due debt to pay to the memory of John Peter Altgeld who, almost alone amid the public men of his time, was true to the democratic vision. Only once did he remark about the slanders that were being heaped upon him. "Remember this about any slander, denial only emphasizes and gives added importance to falsehood. Let it alone, and it will die for want of nourishment."

The General Managers now decided to consolidate the effects of their propaganda against Gene and the American Railway Union by a swift move in the Federal courts. A Special Grand Jury was hastily summoned to inquire into the strike, and this jury Judge Grosscup charged:

> If it appears to you that any two or more persons, by concert, insisted or demanded, under effective penalties and threats, upon men quitting their employment, to the obstruction of the mails

> or interstate commerce, you may inquire whether they did these acts as strangers to these men, or whether they did them under the guise of trustees or leaders of an association to which these men belonged. And if the latter appears, you may inquire whether their acts and conduct in that respect were in faithful and conscientious execution of their supposed authority or was simply a use of that authority as a guise to advance personal ambition or satisfy private malice.

Among the witnesses who appeared before the Grand Jury was a Chicago newspaperman supposed to be the author of an interview with Debs, in which Gene was quoted as uttering threats against the railroad managers. The reporter was shown the interview by the District Attorney and asked if it was what Debs had said. "No, indeed," he replied promptly. "Debs said nothing of the sort. I took down what he said in shorthand, wrote it out, and presented it to the city editor, who threw it away and wrote his own version of the interview, which is what you have there." He was dismissed in a hurry but other witnesses with tales of rioting and the burning of cars provided the necessary groundwork for an indictment against Gene, Howard and Keliher on the charge of conspiracy.

Deputy Marshals walked into Gene's office on the morning of June 15th and placed him and the other two officials under arrest. Bail was immediately provided and Gene and the others went back to work on still another offer to the General Managers promising to call off the strike if the American Railway Union men were reinstated. The association representatives, realizing now that Debs was cornered at last, contemptuously rejected this offer. On July 17th the marshals again appeared and again Gene was arrested. This time the charge was contempt of court in that

Debs, Howard and Keliher, and five directors of the A. R. U. had violated the "gatling gun" injunction. When they were arraigned in court, the A. R. U. men refused to ask for bail, and that night Gene Debs for the first time heard the iron sound which was to ring in his ears so many times thereafter—the closing of a cell door. He describes in *Walls and Bars* his first prison experience in the old Cook County jail:

> I was given a cell occupied by five other men. It was infested with vermin, and sewer rats scurried back and forth over the floors of that human cesspool in such numbers that it was almost impossible for me to place my feet on the stone floor. Those rats were nearly as big as cats, and vicious. I recall a deputy jailer passing one day with a fox-terrier. I asked him to please leave his dog in my cell for a little while so that the rat population might thereby be reduced. He agreed, and the dog was locked up with us, but not for long, for when two or three sewer rats appeared, the terrier let out such an appealing howl that the jailer came and saved him from being devoured.
>
> I recall seeing my fellow inmates of Cook County Jail stripping themselves to their waists to scratch the bites inflicted by all manner of nameless vermin, and when they were through the blood would trickle down their bare bodies in tiny red rivulets. Such was the torture suffered by these men who as yet had been convicted of no crime, but who were awaiting trial. I was given a cell that a guard took the pains to tell me had been occupied by Prendergast, who assassinated Mayor Carter H. Harrison. He showed me the bloody rope with which Prendergast had been hanged and intimated with apparent glee sparkling in his eyes that the same fate awaited me. His intimation was perhaps predicated upon what he read in the newspapers of that period, for my associates and I were accused of every conceivable crime in connection with that historic strike. I was shown the cells that had been occupied by the Chicago anarchists who were hanged, and was told that the gallows awaited the man in this country who strove to better the living conditions of his fellowmen. . . .

3

Far more than by any physical wretchedness, Gene was tortured by the catastrophic pictures which he evoked in his filthy cell. Outside his windows he could hear newsboys calling extras announcing the end of the great strike. He could see beaten men who had followed him so gallantly going back to beg for jobs. He could see himself, a few weeks back, acclaimed by all the world of labor, now a defeated and discredited leader. For he knew very well that never would the marshals have dared to lay their hands upon him if they were not confident that the mass attack headed by the general managers had broken the strikers' ranks. There was, to be sure, some consolation in the hundreds of messages that came to him during the six dreadful days in which he writhed in the Cook County Jail. But no matter how ardently his followers might affirm their love for him and their belief in his integrity, there hung before his eyes the stark fact that what had been called "one of the greatest labor struggles in the history of the country" had ended with the crushing defeat of as fine-spirited a rank and file as ever it had been the fortune of a man to lead.

He had not underestimated the extent of the defeat and its tragic repercussions upon the lives of the workers. Now the dreaded blacklists were consulted by every foreman on the lines that had been struck, and from Chicago to the Coast A. R. U. men were being brusquely informed that there were no jobs for them. Here and there, to be sure, there was a flare-up of the independent spirit which had led to the calling of a strike. One black-listed engineer, finding himself turned away from no less than five jobs, marched into the offices of a railway superintendent in Chi-

cago, slammed the door behind him, and pulled a Colt revolver of terrifying dimensions. "Now you," he said to the startled superintendent, "write out an order putting me back on my old run, and be quick about it. I've got a wife and kids starving at home, and that makes me mighty careless about the way I handle this cannon. And by the way," he concluded as he took the official order, "the day that this is countermanded, you get yourself an ambulance."

But this was a minority protest. When Gene, Keliher and Howard and the others were arraigned before the judges who had issued the injunction to answer to charges of contempt, it was with the idea of getting out on the field and doing what he could to rally his routed forces, that Gene reluctantly consented to accept bail. He went to the last strike meeting at Uhlich's Hall in a bitter mood. "Has anybody ever heard of soldiers being called out to guard the rights of workingmen?" he asked the crowd. "Whatever else I have suffered myself, I have not lost the right of free speech. If Judge Woods expounds the law, I would rather rot in jail than be an alleged freeman." And in this mood he returned to Terre Haute to cast aside forever his affiliation with a political party headed by a man who would, "use the regular army for the breaking of a strike."

He had very much in mind the protests wired Cleveland by the Cook County People's Party, when he exclaimed to the crowds which swarmed as usual to greet him:

> I am a Populist, and I favor wiping out both old parties so they will never come into power again. I have been a Democrat all my life and I am ashamed to admit it. I want every one of you to go to the polls and vote the People's ticket.

While he was waiting for the Supreme Court to decide on the appeal which his lawyers had taken in the contempt case, and awaiting, too, trial on the charges of criminal conspiracy (the bitter dregs of his defeat which his victors were forcing him to drink), Gene resolved to save the remnants of the American Railway Union. His attitude won from Gompers the following:

> The strike of the American Railway Union to influence Pullman to submit to arbitration the controversy between him and his employees will long live in the memory of man as one of the greatest labor struggles in the history of the country. It is true that the struggle was not crowned with the immediate success of the objects sought to be achieved, yet it so thrilled the hearts of the people and riveted their attention, that its lessons and benefits will be wide-spread, deep and lasting. Like many of its predecessors, as we have said, it failed of its immediate object, but it has accomplished more good in directing attention to the underlying wrongs of modern society than all the lectures and publications could secure in a decade. It has made the foolish as well as the wise stop and think and ask, "Whither are we drifting?"
>
> Out of all this tumult it revealed to the world the character of one of its noblest sons, Eugene V. Debs. His earnestness, honesty and sincerity no man on this continent doubts. No one has a shadow of an excuse for doubting him, and it is but right to accord him this faint measure of justice.*

From the man who wrote that he was "truly shocked" at Gene's organizing the American Railway Union, and who in the future was so bitterly to fight Gene all along the line, this was praise indeed.

The *Chicago Times,* which had stood by the strikers, said:

> The slanders that have been directed against Debs during this

* Quoted by John Swinton.

> struggle simply baffle recountal because of their number. He has been called crazy, drunken, revolutionary, criminal, incompetent. Newspapers have at once declared his conduct of the strike impotent and denounced him for making it so effective. Labor has been entreated to throw him over as a puerile leader, and capital has been warned that he is a dangerous man because of his surpassing ability. "Anything to beat Debs" has been the one policy which has animated the organs of capital for the last four months.

As the shouting and the tumult died slowly away, Grover Cleveland decided to find out what had caused it all. He appointed Carroll D. Wright, the brilliant and open-minded first chief of the United States Bureau of Labor, as head of a commission to investigate the strike, and in August both Debs and Pullman gave their versions of the affair to the investigators. Gene discussed with the commissioners the nine thousand and more telegrams which he had sent in the course of the strike, and pointed out that, with one exception, none of them had so much as hinted at violent measures. This exception, which was stressed by Gene's enemies, was a message sent under his Western Union frank, containing the terse advice, "Save your money and get a gun." Gene proved that the telegram had been sent while he was absent from the office, and that it was the irresponsible exuberance of a youngster which dictated it.

"In one sense," Gene said, "the strike was not a failure. It will pass into history as a noble struggle for a righteous cause, and those who participated in it, whatever their immediate sacrifices may be, will, in the end, feel amply compensated for all their losses." And then he gave the commissioners a sudden glance at his changed political philosophy when he came flatly out for the government ownership of railroads. At the protest of his examiners over the

DURING THE "DEBS REBELLION"

U. S. Cavalry Encampment, Chicago Lake Front, 1894.

power that so radical a measure would place in the hands of the workers, Gene remarked drily: "Government ownership of railroads is decidedly better than railroad ownership of government."

When they were done with him, the commissioners were apparently satisfied that Debs had made out a good case for his people, for they fell upon the flustered Pullman with rapid-fire questions indicating a lively skepticism as to the carman's sincerity. Pullman squirmed in the witness chair and finally admitted that in 1893, while he was talking hard times and discharging employees right and left, his company had paid its stockholders dividends of $2,800,000. When Pullman left the stand it was he who was sorely discredited in the public's mind. Gene wrote, in the course of a summation of the effects of the strike:

> . . . But there is a lesson taught by the Pullman strike the study of which affords a glimmer of hope and satisfaction. It has taught the nation to place an honest estimate upon George M. Pullman. It has dragged the wrecker of homes and hopes from his luxurious abode and sentenced him to the pillory for life where he will feel the pelting storms of the scorn of men, women and children who have been the victims of his villainy. . . .

While there is a certain amount of what modern psychologists call "wish fulfilment" in Gene's statement, for the time being, Pullman was in disrepute even with his business colleagues. If the notoriously forgetful republic was later to accept Pullman once again as one "a little lower than the angels," Gene for his part made no compromise. For ten years thereafter he stubbornly refused to so much as enter a Pullman car, contending that the strike had never been settled and that, by God, if he were the only man in the

United States who felt that way, he would have no truck with anything with which the hated name of Pullman was associated. For all those years he cramped his long legs between the uncomfortable backs of seats in day coaches, carrying on, night and day, this one-man strike of his.*

Nor did Altgeld easily forget. Like Gene, he had very heavily on his soul the fate of the Pullman strikers, and he went down to that desolate town and talked to half-starved, black-listed workers and came back and from a full heart wrote an appeal to decent people of his State to send food and clothing to those victims of a bitter industrial warfare.

4

Spectators in Judge Grosscup's court craned their necks on January 26, 1895, as Gene came in with the other A. R. U. officers to stand trial for conspiracy. They wanted to see this man who had monopolized the headlines of last summer's papers. Here in the flesh was the "anarchist agitator." They would thrill their friends with descriptions of his outlandish appearance.

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* Harry T. Smith, now a New York newspaperman, writes that he was a Pullman conductor in 1904, when he came upon Gene in the smoker of the train. Smith writes: "With his usual friendliness, Debs at once laid aside the papers he was reading and began to inquire about my party activities and Socialist views in general. After a few minutes I suggested that we move back to one of the Pullmans where we could continue the conversation at our leisure. Debs hesitated for a moment and then replied: 'My boy, do you know I have never ridden in a Pullman car since the A. R. U. strike?' I came back with the assurance that he need have no fear that the Pullman Company was going to derive any revenue from his ride in one of its cars as my guest and that, anyway, even a righteous boycott had to end sometime. With a laugh, Debs admitted the force of my contention, I picked up his grip and we marched back to the Pullmans. The boycott was off."

They sat back in frank disappointment when Gene was pointed out to them. This was no long-haired fire eater. On the contrary, Debs was nearly bald, mild-appearing, with candid blue eyes behind gold-rimmed spectacles. He wore a high, white collar, a black and white scarf, a gray tweed suit, a boutonniere. When Gene conferred with the sprawling Clarence Darrow (who even in those days chose to sit on the back of his neck) it was the young lawyer in his first big case whom one would pick as the fiery "rabble-rouser" rather than his dignified client.

At the defense table with Darrow was Lyman Trumbull, that stout-hearted liberal who was moving steadily leftwards in his later years. Trumbull was the outstanding figure in Chicago's legal circles. He had been Judge of the Supreme Court of Illinois, Congressman and United States Senator. His appearance in a case was enough to pack the courtroom and here was the famous Trumbull defending the famous Debs. The court attendants were busied holding the door against crowds pouring in from the lobbies.

The craggy Darrow unfolded himself, hitched a shoulder in the direction of the jury and drawled at the twelve men, still under the spell of the opening speech for the prosecution:

"This is an historic case which will count much for liberty or against liberty. . . . Conspiracy, from the days of tyranny in England down to the day the General Managers' Association used it as a club, has been the favorite weapon of every tyrant. It is an effort to punish the crime of thought. If the government does not, we shall try to get the general managers here to tell what they know about conspiracy. . . . These defendants published to all the world what they were doing, and in the midst of a wide-spread strike

they were never so busy but that they found time to counsel against violence. For this they are brought into court by an organization which uses the government as a cloak to conceal its infamous purposes."

This was a defense unexpected, brilliant. It dragged the General Managers' Association into the foreground as party to a conspiracy far more sinister in its implications than the gesturings of labor leaders. For the entire question of freedom of speech and action was here involved. And on that plane Darrow and Trumbull managed to keep the trial to its inconclusive finish.

Wallace De Groot Rice, labor reporter for the *Chicago Herald,* was regarded by the prosecution as its star witness. His testimony was largely discounted when Darrow made him admit that he had received a pass from the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. Rambling stories of eyewitnesses to the derailing and burning of cars failed to connect the defendants with these acts.

When the defense put Gene on the stand on February 6th, he told a straightaway story of his career as an organizer from the early brotherhood days on, and then outlined his ambitions for the American Railway Union which was to end the wage-slashing of the General Managers' Association by presenting a united front of railroad employees. He said the great Northern strike was a peaceful one.

"You simply took possession of the road and held it?" he was asked.

"No, sir; we simply went home and stayed there."

"Give us your definition of a strike."

"A strike is a stoppage of work at a given time by men acting in concert in order to redress some real or imaginary grievance."

"Mr. Debs, will you define the meaning of the word 'scab'?"

"A scab in labor unions means the same as a traitor to his country. It means a man who betrays his fellow men by taking their places when they go on strike for a principle. It does not apply to non-union men who refuse to quit work."

While Gene was conducting this class in elementary trade-unionism, marshals armed with subpoenas were cooling their heels outside the offices of George M. Pullman. Darrow had a number of questions he was most anxious to have Pullman answer. But Pullman had disappeared. Evidently he had no yearning for the witness chair after his experience before Commissioner Wright. For two days the marshals kept up the search only to come back to Judge Grosscup empty-handed.

Then Darrow, with ironic references to the missing magnate, let it be known that he was about to examine members of the General Managers' Association. They were to be questioned as to their secret meetings at which, it was claimed by the defense, general wage-cuts were agreed upon prior to the Great Northern strike. Most especially were they to explain how it happened that Vice President Wicks of the Pullman Company, who could hardly be classified as a general manager, had sat in on their meetings before the American Railway Union stepped on the stage.

The *Chicago Tribune* explained Pullman's disappearance by saying: "It is not strange that he should be unwilling to go on the stand and be questioned by Mr. Darrow. . . . It is not pleasant for a person who is at the head of a great corporation, who has many subordinates and no supe-

riors, and who is in the habit of giving orders instead of answering questions, to be interrogated by persons who are unfriendly to him, and who may put disagreeable inquiries which he has to reply to civilly."

Apparently the subpoenaed managers felt the same way.

At all events, the morning after Gene's testimony only eleven men went into the jury box and Judge Grosscup made this surprising announcement:

"Owing to the sickness of a juror and the certificate of his physician that he will not be able to get out for two or three days I think it will be necessary to adjourn the further taking of testimony in this case."

Darrow sprang up with demands that a juror be selected to take the place of the sick man and that the record of the case to date be read to him. But Grosscup nervously denied Darrow's motion and put the case over until May. It was anti-climax with a vengeance.

The jurors came out of the box to shake hands with Gene who was a bit stunned by the turn of events. The eleven men ignored the outstretched hands of the prosecutors, and several told Gene they would have voted for his acquittal.

Pullman eventually returned and had a talk with the judge in chambers. But while the indictments never were withdrawn, neither was the case called on the day set. The General Managers' Association had strangely lost interest in conspiracies. Nothing more was ever heard of the matter.

In Washington, however, they did not let up so easily. The Supreme Court of the United States upheld the contempt sentences of Gene and his fellow American Railway Union officials as pronounced by Judges Grosscup and Woods. Gene packed his bag again with a six months' jail

sentence waiting at the end of the journey. He and his fellows were taken to the county jail in Woodstock, Illinois, there officially to purge themselves of any contempt which they might feel towards the judiciary.

Gene said, as he left Terre Haute:

> In going to jail for participation in the late strike, I have no apologies to make nor regrets to express. No ignominy attaches to me on account of this sentence. I would not change places with Judge Woods, and if it is expected that six months or even six years in jail will purge me of contempt, the punishment will fail of its purpose.

CHAPTER X

EUGENE V. DEBS—SOCIALIST

COMMISSIONER WRIGHT'S report on the Pullman strike (a report critical of Pullman and the managers' association *) had said: "It is seriously questioned and with much force whether courts have jurisdiction to enjoin citizens from 'persuading' each other in industrial or other matters of common interest."

But the Supreme Court, denying the plea of Darrow and Trumbull for a writ of habeas corpus in the decision read by Justice Brewer, had no such doubts. Unanimously it ruled: "We yield to none in our admiration of any acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, but we may be permitted to add that it is a lesson which cannot be learned too soon or too thoroughly that under this government of and by the people the means of redress of all wrongs are through the courts and at the ballot box and that no wrong, real or fancied, carries with it legal warrant to invite as a means of redress the co-operation of a mob with its accompanying acts

* One section of the report said: "The policy of both the Pullman Company and the Railway Managers' Association with reference to applications to arbitrate closed the door to all attempts at conciliation and settlement of difficulties. The commission is impressed with the belief, by the evidence and by the attendant circumstances as disclosed that a different policy would have prevented the loss of life and great loss of property and wages occasioned by the strike." The commission urged a national system of conciliation and arbitration and the recognition of trades-unions.

of violence. . . . Summing up our conclusions, we hold that the Government of the United States is one having jurisdiction over every foot of soil within its territory and acting directly upon each citizen; that while it is a government of enumerated powers, it has within the limits of those powers all the attributes of sovereignty; that to it is committed power over interstate commerce and the transmission of the mail." *

Debs, on hearing of the decision, said: "Jefferson's prophecy is being literally fulfilled. The 'sappers and miners,' as he denominated them, are at work undermining the Federal fabric . . . railroad corporations may now reduce wages and enforce any kind of conditions upon their employees without fear of resistance. . . . I shall abide by the decision with perfect composure, confidently believing that it will hasten the day of the public ownership not only of the railroads, but of all other public utilities. I view it as the death knell of the wage system. In the long run this decision will prove a blessing to this country."

Darrow flared up: "To my mind it means an end to all labor organizations."

Altgeld, in Springfield, wrote:

> Forty years ago the slave power predominated; today it is capitalism. . . . For over twenty years foreign and domestic capitalism has dominated. It sits in the White House and legislates in the Capitol. Courts of justice are its ministers and legislatures are its lackeys. And the whole machinery of fashionable society is its hand-maiden. . . .
>
> Never has there been so much patriotic talk as in the last 25 years, and never were there so many influences at work strangling Republican institutions.

* In re Debs, 158 U.S. 564 (1895).

Gene fired a final shot before they closed the doors of the little McHenry County Jail in Woodstock, fifty-four miles from Chicago. As he entered Woodstock, he sent this message to his American Railway Union rank and file:

> A cruel wrong against our great and beloved order, perpetrated by William A. Woods, U. S. Circuit Judge, has been approved by the United States Supreme Court and from under its shadow I address this communication to you. . . . Hope has not deserted us.

He spoke of the Statue of Liberty sculptured by Bartholdi, his father's townsman, and concluded with the customary poetical peroration of those days:

> Count me o'er earth's chosen heroes—
> they the souls that stood alone
> (While the men they agonized for,
> threw the contumelious stone),
> Stood serene and down the future saw
> the golden beam incline
> To the side of perfect justice mastered
> by their faith divine
> By one man's plain truth to manhood
> and to God's supreme design.

The railroaders didn't make much out of the poetry, but they got the idea that Gene was being sent to jail because he had the guts to stand up and fight. And they sat down and laboriously wrote to Gene telling him that although he was in jail and they were blacklisted, they would stick to the end.

> Gene suited me all right and I seemed to suit Gene and when I went to that jail we hugged each other and I said "to hell with them Gene, we will lick those —— —— yet." *

* From a letter to the author by an old American Railway Union man.

It was evident that no rank-and-filer looked on Gene as a "discredited leader." Rather did the rank and file blame the loss of the strike on the courts and on the troops and many blamed Chief Arthur of the engineers whom they accused of encouraging wholesale scabbing. As for Gene he stood higher, if anything, in their adoring estimation.

Eugene Field—who had telephoned Gene the night before the latter's arrest: "I hear you are to be arrested. When that time comes you may need a friend. I want to be that friend"—was writing: "Gene Debs is the most lovable man I ever knew. Debs is sincere. His heart is as gentle as a woman's and as fresh as a mountain brook. If Debs were a priest the world would listen to his eloquence, and the gentle musical voice and sad, sweet smile of his would soften the saddest heart."

Field sent word to Woodstock: "Now that you are settled in your summer quarters, I shall be out to see you." But he never came. A few days after he had written Gene, death took that sweet-souled poet.

Gene took with him to Woodstock a cherished telegram which he had received during his trial: "Stand by your principles," it read, "regardless of consequences." And it was signed "Your Mother and Father." Daniel flamed with pride at the thought of his son holding libertarian banners high. Marguerite knew that if Gene had made up his mind that in this situation jail was the place for men of principle, then to jail her boy would go. Katherine locked up the Eighth Street house and came on to Woodstock to show the world that she was standing by her husband. In Terre Haute Theodore took a hitch in his belt and went to work on a mountain of mail. An injury to

one member of the Debs family was always the prompt concern of all.

2

Sheriff George Eckert checked American Railway Union men off as they passed through the jail doors at Woodstock—Debs, Howard, Keliher and Editor L. W. Rogers of the American Railway Union paper, James Hogan, William E. Burns, Roy M. Goodwin and Martin J. Elliott—the last four American Railway Union directors, whose strike activities had provoked the especial anger of the court. When the formalities were done, the sheriff shook hands all around and assured the railroaders that this wasn't Cook County Jail and that he had no intention of treating men imprisoned for contempt of court like the run of convicts.

They had all brought books and before they were there a week they turned the corridor of the jail into a school of social sciences. Gene had Shakespeare, Ingersoll's Speeches,* *Les Miserables*, and now, in addition, Lawrence Gronlund's *Our Destiny, the Influence of Nationalism on Morals and Religion, an Essay in Ethics, Progress and Poverty* and Henry Demarest Lloyd's *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, the book which was raising hob among the new industrialists, notably the Standard Oil group, who sent their agents out to buy up every available copy. Keliher had a copy of Olive Schreiner's *Dreams*, and W. T. Stead's devastating *If Christ Came to Chicago*. Howard mulled over his Bible.

* Gene said at that time, "I don't suppose any one has read Ingersoll as thoroughly as I."

The eight of them drew up this schedule and rigidly imposed a fine of ten cents for any violation of the "quiet" rule:

A. M.		P. M.	
Rise	6:30	Exercise	1:00–2:00
Breakfast	7:00	Quiet	2:00–6:00
Exercise	7:30–8:00	As you please	7:00–9:30
Quiet	8:00–12:00	Retire	9:30

Gene and Keliher contributed the bulk of the fines. They never caught Howard in a violation.

Theodore sent up from Terre Haute the mail which required Gene's attention. Socialists, anarchists, Single Taxers, Nationalists, Populists volley-fired books, papers and pamphlets at Woodstock. It seemed as though every faction of the radicals of 1895 was striving to convert Gene to its particular doctrine.

Pretty little Nellie Bly, famous for her record-breaking trip around the world in 72 days, went out to Woodstock to find Gene banging away at a punching-bag hung at one end of the corridor.

"This is where we develop our magnificent proportions," he chuckled. Her front-page story of her visit was a "human interest" piece of the first order.

Keir Hardie, chairman of the Independent Labour Party of Great Britain and first of the Labor Members of Parliament, came to see Gene. For both men it was a memorable visit. The Scotch coal-hewer gave Gene a glimpse of his downright manner of talking Socialism to the workers in on-the-job language. Gene impressed Hardie with the fact that there was something in the American labor world beyond the hours and wages pragmatism of Gompers.

In contrast to Hardie's insular socialism, Victor Berger, another visitor, presented Gene with a detailed exposition of the doctrinaire and sophisticated Continental school of Socialist thought.* The Milwaukee schoolmaster was in his element, pacing the jail corridor before his respectful railroader-pupils, spouting Marx, Lassalle and Kautsky.

In later years and in a generous moment, Debs wrote:

> It was at this time, when the first glimmerings of Socialism were beginning to penetrate, that Victor L. Berger—and I have loved him ever since—came to Woodstock, as if a providential instrument, and delivered the first impassioned message of Socialism I had ever heard—the very first to set the "wires humming in my system." As a souvenir of that visit there is in my library a volume, *Capital*, by Karl Marx, inscribed with the compliments of Victor L. Berger, which I cherish as a token of priceless value.

Socialist historians have taken Gene at his word and given us a picture of a breathless neophyte springing straight from jail into the arms of Socialism as expounded by Berger. Gene's letters from Woodstock, following Berger's visit, his speeches delivered immediately after his release and his political activities in 1896, bear testimony to no such overnight conversion. That Gene had explored the fundamentals of Socialist ideology is amply proved by his clippings on the subject pasted away in his scrapbooks

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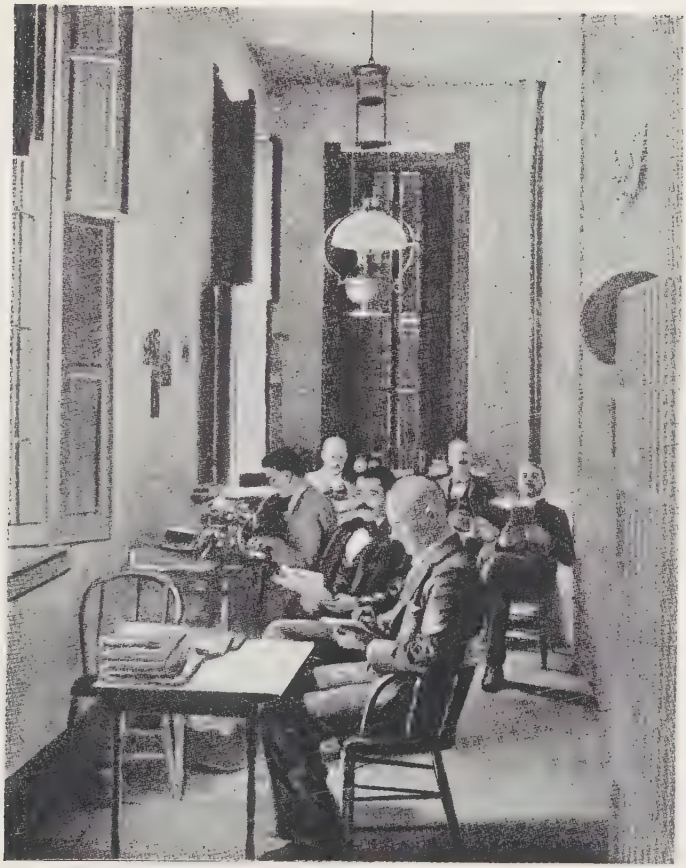
* "The Socialism which triumphed in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee was, however, a Socialism *sui generis*—a peculiarly British product. Continental Socialism was almost everywhere, apart from certain anarchist tinges, purely Marxian in ideas. It was based definitely on the doctrine of the class struggle, and accepted the Marxian economic and historical analysis as the essential basis of its teaching." *A Short History of the British Working Class Movement*, G. D. H. Cole, page 21.



From "Railway Times"

THE "QUIET PERIOD" IN WOODSTOCK JAIL

Gene in foreground

from the late '70's on. He had invited discussion of Socialism in the columns of his magazine, and he was not the sort of an editor who accepts contributions without knowledge of their contents.

As a matter of fact, Marx left Debs cold. Of the Continental Socialists, Lassalle and Kautsky were his men. Robert Blatchford and the early Fabian pamphleteers were his favorites among the English. Even Gene's conscientious application to self-improvement faltered before the formidable style of the gigantic German. It was not so much the Marxian formulas—the class struggle, at any rate, was no mystery to its victim in the Woodstock jail—it was the turgid, Teutonic presentation of these formulas which chilled Gene. The capitalist system from the beginning enjoyed the advantage of having for its chief antagonist a man inveterately polysyllabic. Marx's exposition was as dull as his famous synthesis was brilliant. And his English and American commentators, interpreters, and translators had, for the most part, a positive flair for dullness.

Gene was to help devise a Socialism as indigenously American as Hardie's was English; but he was not ready for that yet.

He said good-bye to Howard and Keliher and the others whose three-months' sentences were over, and then helped the sheriff's daughter lock up the jail. For Gene's contempt in the eyes of the court was twice that of his fellows' and he stayed in jail three months longer working over his books and correspondence from twelve to sixteen hours a day. Katherine boarded with the sheriff's family and she and a stenographer helped with the mail. In two weeks Gene received 1,500 letters.

On the morning of November 23rd, Theodore came to the jail in a cutter and Gene, a free man again, rode around with him, calling on those in Woodstock who had shown kindness to his Kate.

When the two got back to the town square, a special train had come in from Chicago bearing a delegation of trades-unionists, all in their Sunday best, waving American flags and yelling "DEBS! DEBS! DEBS!" They put Gene up on their shoulders and carried him down to the station. All the way into Chicago union bands made triumphant noises. And when the special pulled into the Wells Street station, there rose the mighty, deep-chested roar of working people welcoming back one of their own. . . . "More than 100,000 people blocked the streets and bridges in the vicinity of the depot. The streets were filled with mud and slush and a heavy rain was falling, but the crowd did not seem to pay any attention. Mr. Debs himself refused to enter the carriage hauled by six white horses and as he took his place in the parade he said: 'If the rest walk, I shall walk. What is good enough for them is good enough for me.' " *

The paraders surged along Fifth Avenue to Jackson Street and then on Michigan Avenue to the Battery D Armory. The marchers in the rain sang, "We'll hang Judge Woods to a sour apple tree."

A correspondent from an English paper said to a Chicago reporter, "I have seen popular outbursts in many lands. I have seen nothing like this before. I've seen nothing that even approached it except when Parnell was re-

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* *Debs* by Stephen Marion Reynolds, page 45.

leased from Dublin Jail. Then men went mad as they have here tonight."

Somehow they got Gene to the platform in the armory where Former Governor Waite of Colorado and Henry Demarest Lloyd made short speeches of welcome.

Lloyd in a frock coat and gray striped trousers, wearing pince-nez on a gold chain, a jeweled scarfpin and a big seal ring, made a red-hot radical speech in a perfect Gramercy Square accent. "A sympathetic strike is orthodox Christianity in action." "In these days every man is liable to imprisonment at the mercy of the sour temper or the sour stomach of the judge." The crowd roared at that. This feller Lloyd might look like a dude but he talked like a man.

Then Gene unlimbered. "I do not appear before you as a hero or a martyr or a benefactor," he said when he got the audience finally to sit down and stop cheering, "but just as a plain inmate of a county jail and there is neither sentiment nor poetry nor glory about it."

But he couldn't keep the poetry out for the next day, when he faced another great crowd in Terre Haute, he said: "As a rosebud yields to the tender influence of a summer shower, so I now open my heart to receive your benediction." Coal-miners, scoopers and throttle men, streetcar men, factory workers, sentimental as schoolgirls when Gene was speaking, wept at this and then they growled ominously when Gene lashed out at Rockefeller, that "pirate plutocrat." No contemporary orator could shift as swiftly from the roccoco sentiment which was expected of the public speakers of the '90's, to the bitterest ad hominem attack as could Debs. One moment he was all sweetness and

light. The next he was crouched over, his voice harsh, his eyes flaming, the barbed and scornful adjectives tumbling from his lips. Woods, Grosscup, Olney, Pullman, Pinkerton, Wall Street—these were words that lighted fires in him. It was difficult to realize that he was officially purged of contempt when Gene spoke of the courts.

At his parents' home, Gene found a tragedy impending. Daniel had laid aside sufficient money to retire and now at a time when he could at last take down his beloved books and read to his heart's content, blindness threatened. Local oculists and Eastern specialists alike could do little for him. He sat in the sunlight peering through a reading glass at type which blurred. Gene read aloud to him on his first Sunday home the speech of Enjolras in *Les Miserables:*

> Citizens [it began], do you picture to yourselves the future? The streets of the cities flooded with light, green branches upon the thresholds, the nations sisters, men just, the old men blessing the children, the past loving the present, thinkers in full liberty, believers in full equality, for religion the heavens, human conscience become the altar, no more hatred, the fraternity of the workshops and the school, for reward and for penalty notoriety to all, labor for all, law, over all peace, no more bloodshed, no more war, mothers happy! To subdue matter is the first step; to realize the ideal is the second. Reflect upon what progress has already done. Once the early human races looked with terror upon the hydra which blew upon the waters, the dragon which vomited fire, the griffin, monster of the air, which flew with the wings of an eagle and the claws of a tiger; fearful animals which were above man. Man, however, has laid his snares, the sacred snares of intelligence, and has at last caught the monsters. We have tamed the hydra, and he is called the steamer; we have tamed the dragon, and he is called the locomotive; we are on the point of taming the griffin; we have him already, and he is called the balloon. The day when this promethean work shall be finished, and when man shall have definitely harnessed to his will the triple chimera

of the ancients, the hydra, the dragon and the griffin, he will be master of the water, the fire, and the air, and he will be to the rest of the animated creation what the ancient gods were formerly to him. Courage, and forward! . . .

Though he longed for rest, Gene could not stay in Terre Haute. His blacklisted followers sent urgent letters. They were counting on him, somehow, to see them through. Debts of $40,000 incurred by the American Railway Union during the strike hung over him. He assumed personal responsibility for their payment, although he had cut off his $75 a month salary from the A. R. U., and given up his empty title (and his salary) as editor of the *Firemens' Magazine*. He borrowed money and went out on the road with Theodore to fill the speaking engagements which had poured in since the first days of the strike. Many of them came from middle-class organizations whose members were curious to see this agitator in action. Gene made them pay and pay well for that opportunity. Nor did he, as is so often the case with radical speakers in similar circumstances, temper any of the winds of his doctrines for the shorn lambs in his audience. He "discomfited the comfortable" in the manner of Wendell Phillips before his Phi Beta Kappa hearers.

From such gatherings he escaped with relief to the haunts of the railroaders, and there would be hours of tall "railroad talk" which was once described by a witness before an industrial commission as dealing with "whiskey, women and shorter hours and higher pay." *

Like the vast majority of railroaders Gene was a whiskey drinker. A few drinks gave his emotional nature its escape. He would jump up and fling his arms around a man who

* Quoted by Carl Sandburg in *The American Songbag.*

had said something appealing. He would tell stories that he had from Riley and Bill Nye (whom Gene, now that he was bald, so closely resembled that Nye joshed Gene about being his "Doppelganger") and Eugene Field and Dan Voorhees. And he would speak out his mind about politicians and railroad executives and coal operators in "large, divine and comfortable words."

No one thought anything about Gene's drinking then. His friends knew that as far as women went, Gene was steadfastly true to Kate, and if he found in drinking release from financial worries, the importunities of his followers, the tragic spectacle of a union which he had builded now crumbling fast away, whose business was that? It was not until later years, when Gene came into contact with middle-class reformers who, to this day, so strangely mix teetotalism with Socialism, that his drinking took on legendary proportions. The truth seems to be that the stories about Gene in his cups come largely from a group of neurotic professional uplifters with no understanding of Gene's background and temperament. Gene mixed with publicans and sinners in hotel barrooms in the big cities, in Midwest small-town saloons and gambling houses in Western mining camps. The labor movement in his time went to those places. And Gene had plenty to do with the public affairs of that movement without taking on the private reform of its individual members. Besides, to a remarkable degree, he possessed an attribute so lacking in the make-up of so many radicals—tolerance.

"Some well-meaning but deluded people think that all wickedness can be overcome and the millennium ushered in by prohibition," he said in an irritated moment, "anything they do not happen to like is bad according to their ethics,

and forthwith is put upon their prohibition list. They throw a fit over a man taking a drink or playing a game of cards, but they are not concerned about wage-slavery or child-sweating which have a thousand victims where the saloon has one. . . . It is wonderful how tamely people will consent to this spirit of intolerance, this mean and narrow fanaticism. . . . Speaking for myself, if I were hungry and friendless today, I would rather take my chances with a saloon-keeper than with the average preacher." *

As Gene went lecturing westward, he found himself dogged by pudgy men with large feet who dodged on and off trains, hung on the fringes of crowds that came to greet him, bobbed up in hotel lobbies. They were private detectives in the employ of the General Managers' Association and their job was to shadow Gene and report back on his progress in reviving the A. R. U.

In a hotel lobby in San Francisco, Gene told a group of "rails" how he was being followed. "See those two sitting over there?" he said. "They've trailed me all over this division."

Hearing this, a huge switchman strode across the lobby, plucked up the two detectives by their coat collars and threw them into the street. No words were spoken. The switchman came back, wiping his hands, to continue his silent adoration of Gene. (This frank hero-worship, by the way, was sometimes embarrassing. A diminutive fireman, escorting Gene into a hall in 'Frisco, was horrified to discover a railroader seated on the front row with his hat on. All proceedings were halted while Gene's escort confronted the of-

* From the *Terre Haute Tribune,* March 1, 1908.

fender. "Take your hat off, you —— —— ——. Don't you know that Gene Debs is here?")

The constant shadowing of Gene was effective in hindering his work of reorganization. Men who had managed to get their jobs back kept away from his meetings, fearing to be spotted by the plain-clothes men in every one of Gene's audiences. Blacklisted American Railway Union men had no heart for incurring further punishment by going to a Debs meeting. Notices were posted in many a railroad yard warning employees that attendance at these meetings would result in prompt discharge.

At one division point only six men were in the hall at the hour Gene was scheduled to speak. The chairman told him that they were all railroad officials come to see that none of their employees was present. "Fine," exclaimed Gene, "I'll talk to them." For an hour he expounded trades-unionism to its sworn enemies.

In California, Gene found that Judge Ross had been locking up A. R. U. men for contempt of court with unusual severity, and that there was acute suffering among the families of the prisoners. Gene announced that he would tour the State and turn the proceeds of his meetings over to the relief of the jailed men's dependents. His first meeting in Los Angeles was a big one. Radicals and railroaders kept Gene and Theodore up until five o'clock in the morning, talking Populism, Socialism, Unionism. The brothers did not take their clothes off, and at seven, a railroader, red-faced with anger, came into their room, carrying a copy of the *Los Angeles Times*. This was the organ of General Harrison Gray Otis, the most relentless foe of organized labor on the Pacific Coast. The belligerent Gen-

eral had spread himself in his leading editorial on the Debs meeting. He pictured Gene as a seditionist come to peaceful California to start a new civil war. He used a soldier's colorful vocabulary in describing Debs, his ancestry and past history.

Gene read the editorial, got up and said to the local man: "We've got our last meeting scheduled at San Bernardino. We were going home from there. But afterward we're coming back. You hire Hazzard's Pavilion. That seats about 5,000 people. I'll pay for it out of my own pocket. Get out dodgers saying that I'll answer this editorial there next Sunday night. And don't bother with any newspaper advertising. The dodgers will bring the crowd."

Theodore says that on Sunday night the pavilion was so jammed, (men, women and children who had rushed the doors were packed standing in the aisles five minutes after the last seat was taken) that, "if a man had died of heart trouble in there he couldn't have fallen down."

Gene liked to pace up and down the platform when he had swung into the body of his speech, but there was no room for any pacing that night. He had to stand on a table placed on the platform because every inch of space there was taken.

"I have here a copy of The Los Angeles Daily Liar," he began, "and I will now take up the lies one by one. The first lie . . ."

He had been going about twenty minutes when some one slipped a card into Theodore's hand. "Tell Gene to be careful" was scrawled on the card, "Judge Ross and General Otis are in the audience." Theodore reached the card up to Gene. The latter read it slowly and then his face lighted

with unholy joy. "Sometimes the Lord is good to us," he said behind his hand to his brother, "now I'm going to put both of those rascals in the pillory." Then Gene lifted up his voice and called:

"I understand Mr. Otis is in the audience. Let him come up here and make his charges against me in the presence of his neighbors. I'll guarantee him complete protection and a courteous hearing."

"Otis! Otis! Get up there and repeat your charges!" shouted the crowd. But Otis and Ross, halfway down the hall, turned and tried to push their way to the door. The men in the aisles would not let them pass. "If you won't take the platform, you'll stay here until Gene is done with you."

Aiming his forefinger at the two, Gene said, "Judge Ross is just part of the rolling stock of the Southern Pacific. Look at his linen and you'll find it's marked, 'S.P.' " He finished with Ross, daring the judge to charge him with contempt. Then he went on to Otis. "If in what I now have to say I do not prove Otis a monumental liar, I'll give any charitable institution in California one thousand dollars."

"You'd better take the first train out of here," said the reporters when Gene, limp, the sweat pouring from him, was finally done. "Ross will have you in jail if you don't get out of this town right quick."

"I'll be here until tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock," said Gene, giving them the name of his hotel. "I figure that Judge Ross has had all of me he wants."

Gene went out of Los Angeles with no word from Judge Ross. The railroaders tried to get him up on their shoulders at the station.

3

All the way home Gene and Theodore, limbering their long legs on station platforms, heard talk of hard times; * the currency; the chances of the oncoming Populists joining with the Democrats in a mass uprising against the Golden East.

Gene observed with a certain grim satisfaction the isolation of Grover Cleveland, now, as Woodrow Wilson put it: "a man alone without a party." But Cleveland still had control of the office-holders' machine and no one, save possibly Richard P. Bland, "Silver Dick," the leader of the silver forces, had arisen from Democratic ranks to knock that machine to pieces. There was talk, it was true, of the young Nebraska Congressman, William Jennings Bryan. But to Gene he seemed to make more sound than sense. David Houston † listened to Bryan in Fort Worth early in 1895 and wrote:

> I have discovered one could drive a prairie schooner through any part of his argument and never scrape against a fact or a sound argument.

When Bryan, however, said of Cleveland that the President had become "the tainted instrument in the hands of concentrated wealth, the official head of the 'communion of pelf,' who had tried to take the very political life of every

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* "Never within my memory have so many people literally starved to death as in the past few months. . . . Millions of people who say nothing about it are at this moment at their wits' end. There are millions of people who do not want charity but want work." . . . The Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage quoted in *Bryan,* Paxton Hibben, page 189.

† Ibid, page 169.

David whom the people trusted," Gene sat up. Sense seemed joined to sound in this analysis at any rate. It chimed so sweetly with Gene's estimate of Cleveland that Gene wished he had said it himself. There might be something in this Bryan.

Mark Hanna sold Major William McKinley jr. to the Republican convention, meeting tumultuously in St. Louis in 1896, and then went methodically to work to sell this colorless frock-coat to the nation. Hanna's job was no easy one. McKinley had been known as a bimetallist but under the shrewd tutelage of the thick-necked pragmatist from Ohio, he soon developed a profound antipathy for silver. At all events, the "gold bugs" of the East had to take him, for by one spread-eagle speech (and by the aid of some shrewd behind-the-scenes manoeuvring) William Jennings Bryan had swept the Democratic convention. "The Boy Orator of the Platte" calling on wage workers, farmers and small business men to join in a crusade against the hated Easterners thundered:

> Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.

Bedlam! "The delegates arose and marched for an hour, shouting, weeping, rejoicing. They lifted this orator upon their shoulders and carried him as if he had been a god. At last a man! 'Silver Dick' must step aside as John the Baptist did of old!" wrote Edgar Lee Masters.*

* *Bryan,* Hibben, page 186.

Two weeks later, farmers and wageworkers, most of them imbued with a Jacksonian democracy on which Bryan was eloquently but rather vaguely articulate, met at Chicago in the convention of the People's Party (the Populists).

The majority were for getting behind Bryan and the Democratic platform which took a direct fling at Cleveland by denouncing "arbitrary interference by the Federal authorities in local affairs" and "government by injunction."

The railroad men and a few "boring-from-within" Socialists stamped their feet and cheered when Debs's name was mentioned in connection with these planks. When the anti-fusionists got the platform to present their nominees for the Presidency, one speaker named Eugene Victor Debs.

The leaders of the farm groups could not see their people following a labor agitator whom all the papers had been calling an "anarchist." As was so often the case in dealing with Debs, his opponents turned off the lights. Angry labor men bumped around in the dark hall for a while but it was evident the next morning that Gene was already too far gone to the left to lead the Populists, more exercised over the free coinage of silver than the free organization of labor. Gene got but eight votes. By a vote of 1,042 to 321, Bryan's candidacy was endorsed by the Populists.

When he heard the news Hanna grinned. Now it was possible to picture Bryan as the tool of all the forces of discontent in the nation, and the *New York Tribune* came nobly to bat by announcing that the Bryan campaign appealed to "the basest passions of the least worthy members of the community. . . . Its nominal head was worthy of the cause. Nominal because the wretched rattle-pated boy, posing in vapid vanity and mouthing resounding rottenness,

was not the real leader of that league of hell. He was only a puppet in the blood-imbued hands of Altgeld the anarchist, and Debs the revolutionist, and other desperadoes of that stripe." *

John Hay was a little less violent but no less perturbed when he wrote Henry Adams:

"What if the Baby Demosthenes should get in with his program: free silver; abolition of Supreme Court; abolition of national banks; confiscation of railroads and telegraphs? Add to this such trifles as making Debs Attorney-General, and you or Brooks secretary of state."

In the East, worried bankers gazed on cartoons showing Bryan holding a cross of gold while in the background Debs and Altgeld brandished knives and torches. They dropped their papers for their checkbooks and gave to Mark Hanna's war chest until it hurt. They financed an expedition of bellowing Civil War generals who rode around the country in a special train assuring the skeptical farmers that free silver was a folly. They got up a parade of 150,000 "substantial citizens," which marched up Broadway in New York City in a blaze of high hats. They let workers know that there would be no jobs for them if Bryan were elected. They manufactured for the first time that strange device called "prosperity" which with one or two exceptions has served them so efficiently ever since.

The Republican candidate was quite submerged in all this. He stood on the porch of his home at Canton, Ohio, trying to make visiting delegations forget that he had once been a bimetallist. In the hired band which broke out with patriotic music at the approach of visiting "sound money-

* Quoted in *The Rise of American Civilization,* Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, page 340.

ites" was a young German socialist who had marched in the eight-hour-day demonstrations before the Haymarket bomb went off, and who was to give American socialism a saving tang of humor. He played a slip horn, being a musician of parts, and had a diabolical way of flatting on the high notes of "The Star-Spangled Banner." His name was Oscar Ameringer.

On the Democratic side, Bryan was conducting his memorable campaign:

> "Their candidate made a gallant figure wherever he moved," wrote Woodrow Wilson, "and went up and down the country as no Presidential candidate before him had ever done, to give the people his own striking version of the doctrines he preached. To the excited crowds who pressed about him he seemed a sort of knight errant going about to redress the wrongs of a nation. There could be no mistaking his earnestness or his conviction or the deep power of the motives to which he appealed. His gifts were those of the practiced orator, his qualities those of the genuine man of the people. His strong musical voice carried his message to the utmost limits of any throng, and rang in a tone which warmed men's blood. There could be no doubting the forces of conviction which lay back of him . . . the great throngs out-of-doors who cheered . . . with full-throated ardor cheered because they also believed.

Gene saw in the Democratic platform, if not so clearly in the Democratic candidate, an opportunity to bring home the lessons of the Pullman strike and the need of industrial unionism. He went campaigning.

The crowds that turned out to hear Gene tell about "government by injunction" were no whit smaller than those which cheered Bryan. But unlike Bryan's agricultural audiences, they were made up of wageworkers.

Gene's intimates insist that Bryan's managers, jealous of the attention showered on Gene and alarmed at the constant

linking of Debs's name with Bryan's, cut down Gene's speaking schedule. However that may be, Gene came back to Terre Haute to vote for Bryan, convinced that the campaign had not been in vain. McKinley won, by the grace of Hanna and Wall Street, but 6,000,000 men voted for Bryan. Among those 6,000,000 it seemed to Gene, there were those ready for a far more substantial democratic structure than anything Bryan had in mind. They voted for Bryan, Gene believed, not because of any passionate interest in the theories of bimetallism, but rather because they saw in the handsome Nebraskan the personification of their resentment at the domination of their affairs by railroad and banking cliques. For a starting point for his new venture, Gene had what was left of the American Railway Union. To be sure that embattled organization had now been stripped to the bone, but those who still clung to it could be counted on for any finish-fight into which Gene might lead them.

Gene called his railroaders together in convention in Chicago on June 15, 1897, and there wound up the affairs of the American Railway Union. On June 18th, the same delegates announced to the world that they were now the Social Democracy. Gene said:

> I supported Mr. William J. Bryan and the platform upon which he stood, not because I regarded the free coinage of silver as a panacea for our national ills, for I neither affirmed nor advocated such a principle, but because I believed that the triumph of Mr. Bryan and free silver would blunt the fangs of the money power. . . . The free silver issue gave us, not only a rallying cry, but afforded common ground upon which the common people could unite against the trusts, syndicates, corporations, monopolies—in a word, the money power. . . .

He had expressed the sentiment of the rank and file.* He now flatly declared himself a Socialist—"There is no hope for the toiling masses of my countrymen except by the pathways mapped out by Socialists, the advocates of the co-operative commonwealth."

As soon as word passed around radical circles that Gene Debs had definitely abandoned Populism and taken his stand as a Socialist, there came into the convention hall an assortment of free-lance humanitarians, trades-unionists, anarchists, religious uplifters and Utopians. While the railroaders still formed the bulk of the delegates, the newcomers were able to make their impress upon this most informal of conventions. The convention elected an executive board consisting of Debs as chairman, James Hogan as vice chairman, Sylvester Keliher as secretary-treasurer, and William E. Burns and R. M. Goodwin as organizers. All of these had been in Woodstock Jail, all were railroaders. And what Gene said went with them. There was to be a national council with a membership elected by State units, and upon these principles the Social Democracy was launched, amid the booming shouts of railroaders and the more restrained applause of their new-found allies:

> With a view to the immediate relief of the people, all our efforts shall be put forth to secure to the unemployed self-supporting employment. . . . For such purpose one of the States of the Union, to be hereafter determined, shall be selected for the concentration of our supporters and the introduction of co-operative industry, and then gradually extending the sphere of our operations until the national co-operative commonwealth shall be established.

* Gene wrote to his friend, Frank Hall, of Denver: "The convention will take decided action. The time for resoluting has passed. The whole country is stirred up over the new movement."

> We call upon all honest citizens to unite under the banner of the Social Democracy of America, so that we may be ready to conquer capitalism by making use of our political liberty, and by taking possession of the public power.

The declaration of principles, however, included more than a statement of fundamental purpose. It added a set of immediate demands for relief:

1. Public ownership of all industries controlled by monopolies, trusts and combines.
2. Public ownership of the railroads, telegraphs, telephone, and all means of transportation, communication, water works, gas and electric plants, and all other utilities.
3. Public ownership of all gold, silver, lead, coal, iron, and all other mines; also all oil and gas wells.
4. Reduction of hours of labor.
5. Public works for unemployed.
6. Inventions to be free—the public to pay the inventor.
7. Postal savings banks.
8. Initiative and referendum; imperative mandate; proportional representation.*

It was a long road over which Eugene Victor Debs had come, at length, to Socialism. He had been on it for forty-one years. It had led him by way of fraternal and benevolent unionism through the more militant phases of unionism on strike, on through the vague aspirations of Populism to his present conception of Socialism, half political half Utopian. In Socialism he found a home which he was never again to leave. For the remaining years of his life he was to devote his vast energy to that one cause. It was to be the mission of this tall, bald "man of the plebs" to bring Socialism down to the American earth, and breathe

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* *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States,* Nathan Fine, pages 190–191.

into it a life compounded not of dogmas and doctrines brought from overseas, but of such things as are known to men whose gloves are frozen to coupling pins on wintry prairie nights, whose picks ring against the face of coal five hundred feet beneath the cornfields.

CHAPTER XI

THE PIONEERS

We were having a meeting of our Socialist Labor Party branch up in Harlem to decide how much we could contribute to help the cause of the Social Democrats in their fight against Bismarck. That was what most of the meetings were about those days. All the talking was in German, and we were all greenhorns, you may believe. For us, America beyond Manhattan Island was a strange and somewhat terrifying continent, and our eyes were forever looking back towards the Fatherland. To be sure, some of the younger men who had mastered English wanted to take Karl Marx out on the street and explain him to the workers. But we older men shook our heads at this. It was not time. The comrades in Germany needed every cent we could send them, and it was a waste of energy to try to explain to this *lumpen proletariat* such economic mysteries (understood only by us of the inner circle) as the theory of surplus value, the social functions of labor, *und so weiter*.

Then suddenly there came an English-speaking young man, knocking at our door. He insisted on coming in although we told him that he must be mistaken. He said he was not mistaken, that he had read about Socialism, that it interested him and he wanted to hear more about it. We opened our mouths and stared at him. Here was an obviously American-born working man who had come to us of his own volition. If he had dropped from heaven we could have been no more surprised. Such a fuss as we made over him! And why not? He was our first convert, and what evangelist is not entitled to rejoice over his first convert?

This description of a socialist meeting a few short years before Gene formed the Social Democracy, gives a picture

of the isolation from all the main currents of American life experienced by those German forerunners.

> When the founders of the Socialist Labor Party, says Morris Hillquit in *Socialism in the United States*, assumed the task of acclimatizing the Socialist movement in this country, they undertook an enterprise of extraordinary difficulty and tremendous proportions.
>
> For almost a full generation they plodded away at their self-imposed task in the face of adversities which have no parallel in the history of the Socialist movement in any other country. Their internal strifes were but the natural echo of their great struggles with the hostile surroundings and may easily be pardoned; and their courage, perseverance and devotion to the cause cannot fail to arouse our admiration. . . .

It was a swarthy, full-bearded college professor, a native of the island of Curacao of the Dutch West Indies, who first set up the longed-for contact between the Socialist Labor Party and the American workers. This was Daniel De Leon, a young instructor of International Law at Columbia University. His Socialist career was to be a stormy one, shot through with petty wrangling and dissensions of the most violent nature. At the end, he was to see the Socialist Labor Party—the organization to which he had given his life—going down to a flatulent futility. But while many old-timers in the Socialist Party of today cannot speak his name without bitterness, De Leon's contribution to American Socialism was important. All the eccentricities of his quarrelsome nature and forbidding personality may not erase De Leon's name from the honor roll of socialist pioneers.

He came to the Socialist Labor Party when that organization was sixteen years old and he was thirty-seven. He arrived via Henry George and an exhaustive reading in sociology. About the effusiveness of his welcome, there is

something almost wistful. Here was none other than a Herr Professor from Columbia University itself, American-born (though to be sure it was the America of the Caribbeans that gave him birth), who had an extensive working knowledge of the fundamentals of Socialism and who was willing, yes, even eager, to go out on the street corners of New York and expound Socialism. He served his apprenticeship soap-boxing for August Delebar, the Socialist Labor Party candidate for mayor in 1890, and was promptly made a national lecturer. He came easily to the intellectual leadership of his party, and he had no such democratic instincts as those which led Gene to refer everything to his rank and file. He was a ruthless little man, convinced of the eternal rightness of any course on which he embarked, and he saw very clearly the markings, to the last buoy, of the course which the Socialist Labor Party must follow. He took the tiller and gave orders, and woe be to any member of the crew who failed to jump at his command.

The first objective was the labor movement, and to capture the labor movement you must first capture the executive committees of its various formal organizations, said De Leon. To this end, the Socialists must employ those tactics known in trades-union parlance as "boring from within." At the time of his emergence, the Knights of Labor were still powerful, and forthwith De Leon sent his emissaries into the inner councils of the Knights with instructions to convert that order to Socialism. He had no small part in the overthrow of Powderly, and rejoiced when Sovereign became grand master workman. But in 1895 he was vehemently denouncing Sovereign and was hard at work on the formation of a national trades-union movement

of his own which was to displace the "reactionary" A. F. of L. and the vanishing Knights as well. This he called the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. At the beginning of its short life it had some 15,000 members mostly drawn from the New York City trades-unions. De Leon, now editor of *The People*, the weekly organ of the S. L. P., preached a new theory of unionism which was to have nothing to do with what he called "mean, groveling improvements or hunger-aggravating crumbs." All who did not subscribe to the tenets of this new unionism of De Leon's were portrayed as "labor fakers" and "pure and simpletons." Some of his hottest shots he reserved for Samuel Gompers who, in turn, referred to De Leon as "that monumental libeler, that assassin of men's characters." When Gompers, for the first and only time in his life, was defeated for the presidency of the A. F. of L., mainly through the activities of the Socialist delegates in the 1894 convention of the federation, De Leon was rapturous. He hailed the man who had defeated Gompers, John McBride of the miners,* and wrote:

> *The People* of Sunday, April 12, 1891, consoled itself over the then recent decease of the Great American Humbug and king of circus shows, with the reflection: "Barnum is dead, but Gompers is alive." That consolation proved short-lived. In the light of recent events and the election returns, there is no consolation left: Barnum is dead and so is Gompers.

Stung, Gompers snarled back: "I shall meet you and yours in the days to come, and then and there when the labor movement is antagonized by your organization." Much of Gompers' implacable distrust of anything remotely

* De Leon soon repudiated McBride.—Author's note.

savoring of Socialism had its origin in the hatred which he nursed for De Leon and all his followers.

Whatever his critics might say about De Leon's methods, there was none who could deny that he had brought Socialism into a most direct contact with organized labor. No trade-union leader but was uneasily aware of its active existence this side the Atlantic. And while the men of the rank and file may not have appreciated De Leon's economic interpretation of history and his vaunted "discovery of the necessity of forming the industrial battalions that can 'take and hold' the wealth power now in possession of the capitalist class," they knew what a "labor faker" was, and they had a sneaking admiration for any one who could put a spark under the fat bottoms of their swivel-chair officials.

While he was, as he himself put it, "relentlessly smiting the labor bunco-steerers," De Leon was exposed to the danger which menaces most dictators—the defection of his followers. De Leon knew that in 1889 the Socialist Labor Party had been well-nigh destroyed by a factional row between V. L. Rosenberg, the secretary of the party, and the group back of the German Socialist daily, the *New York Volkszeitung*. The Rosenberg group had been excommunicated and was now a "perambulating faction," looking for a political resting-place.

De Leon, however, ardent student of history though he was, could never apply its lessons to his immediate situations. He had no fear of factionalism. In truth, he seemed to welcome the opportunity to expel those whom he called heretics. It gave him a feeling of power. Like many intellectuals he sought compensation in emotional outbursts, for a sedentary life at an editorial desk. This he found by acting the part of an American Robespierre guillotining his

victims. He became increasingly arbitrary. Every manifesto which issued from his pen was to be accepted as Holy Writ. Not until the coming of the American Communists in 1920 was there such strutting insistence on rigid adherence to doctrine as De Leon exhibited.

First the German Socialists and then the newly-arrived Russian Jewish radicals began to chafe at the De Leon bit. In November, 1895, a Socialist-controlled Jewish daily, the *Abendblatt,* dared to criticize De Leon. He was turning "faithful trades-unionists into not wholly unjustified enemies of the existing Socialist Labor Party." From then on the opposition grew steadily. At the party convention in 1896 De Leon's supporters attempted to end dissension by throwing out the dissenters. The convention voted to withdraw from support of the Jewish Socialist press.

Abraham Cahan, a Polish Jew who had participated in the Russian revolutionary movement and had come to the United States in 1882, a refugee from political persecution, Meyer Gillis, Louis E. Miller, Morris Winchevsky and others started the *Jewish Daily Forward* as an independent Socialist and labor paper in April, 1897.

Cahan and his group, prominent among them the great-spirited Meyer London, had been successful in breaking down the antagonism of the devotedly religious Jewish immigrants to their radical countrymen.

In the *Women's Garment Workers,* Dr. Louis Levine writes:

> Many of the Jewish immigrants suspected the intellectuals of being Christian missionaries in disguise, whose purpose was to undermine the Jewish faith. It took much patience on the part of the radicals to break through this wall of fear and antagonism. They succeeded to the extent to which they did by taking a keen

interest in the immediate interests of the Jewish workers. Most of the intellectuals could not at once pursue their chosen professions in the new country, and worked in the shops side by side with other immigrants. Here they tried in every way to win the confidence of the workers, to stimulate their sense of independence, to arouse in them a demand for better working and living conditions. They were the first to carry on a campaign against the sweatshops, and organized an Anti-Sweating League as early as 1886. Outside the shop, the intellectuals tried to influence the workers by offering them intellectual stimulation and entertainment, or by assisting them in their industrial and economic problems. In their writings as well as by word of mouth, the intellectuals interpreted to the immigrant workers the meaning of American life, as they understood it.

The workers thus became accustomed to the fact that whenever they were in trouble, the people who came to them with help and advice were the Socialists and anarchists. The helpless immigrant of those days who felt surrounded by "sweaters" and others eager to exploit him, who felt humble and dejected in the face of industrial conditions he could not control, was moved to the depths of his soul by such evidence of service. His gratitude to those who helped him would know no bounds. Every time a strike was won the Jewish workers would go wild with joy and kiss those who helped them. In this way the Socialists and anarchists appeared to the impressionable mass as a new Moses who would lead them out of the Egypt of industrial exploitation. In this atmosphere of mass emotions the seeds of Socialism and anarchism were warmed into growth. A minority of more active and alert workers who gradually lost interest in the traditional atmosphere of the synagogue and of the ghetto life, made the step from passive acquiescence in Socialist and anarchist leadership to an active acceptance of their creeds. To them Socialism or anarchism became their religion and their philosophy, the source of their intellectual and imaginative life. They thronged the meeting-rooms and lecture-halls of the Socialists and anarchists to get the thrill of new ideas, to pick up some of the science and knowledge which an indifferent world had no time to share with them, to associate themselves in some degree with the movements of Darwinism, Spencerianism, Comtism, Marxism, Bakunism and other isms. The number of these converted workers was small. The largest meetings

in those days would attract a few hundred people, and those who joined the Socialist parties or anarchist groups could be counted in dozens. But these small groups without difficulty assumed leadership among the masses and became the connecting link between the political and social organizations and the workers in the shops. . . .*

Looking about for a new alliance, the *Forward* group came across the Social Democracy now opening up headquarters in Chicago. Cahan, London, I. A. Hourwich, Miller and Winchevsky secured the endorsement of the Social Democracy by the Jewish Socialists. It was a paper printed in Yiddish in the New York ghetto which proved to be the most powerful champion of Gene Debs's new venture. No stranger alliance was ever formed in the history of American politics than that between the spokesmen for the sweated New York garment workers and Gene's hard-boiled Mid-West railroaders.

No sooner had the Social Democracy been born, than there arose among its members the seemingly inevitable squabbling which accompanies radical births. The two-fold nature of the program—utopianism and practical political action—set the stage for a combat between the colonizers led by the picturesque old Richard J. Hinton, a friend of Gene's hero, John Brown, Cyrus Field Willard and W. P. Borland, both labor journalists, and the group more interested in immediate political gains than in trying to raise money for the purchase of a radical oasis in the conservative deserts.

While the politicals could, within a year, point pridefully to the effects of their propaganda in the East, notably in Massachusetts, the colonizers came to the second, and

* *The Women's Garment Workers,* Louis Levine, pages 30–31.

last, convention of the Social Democracy in Chicago, in June, 1898, to report that with all their efforts they had succeeded in raising but $2,500, with nothing tangible to show for it. To be sure there was the chance to buy 560 acres of land in the Cripple Creek region of Colorado for $200,000. But nowhere in sight was the $5,000 required for cash payment. Writes Morris Hillquit:

> The colonization schemes of the Social Democracy had opened the doors of the party to all varieties of social reformers, and even a number of prominent anarchists joined the organization in the hope of exploiting it for the propaganda of their theories.
>
> But side by side with this movement the clear Socialist element within the party grew in numbers and strength. Many former members and several entire sections of the Socialist Labor Party joined the new organizations, and these, together, with some prominent leaders within the Social Democracy, headed by Victor L. Berger, of Milwaukee, Wis., inaugurated a movement to substitute ordinary Socialist propaganda and politics for the colonization scheme of the party.
>
> Under these circumstances the first national convention of the Social Democracy was held in Chicago on June 7, 1898. The convention was attended by seventy delegates, representing ninety-four branches of the party, and it became at once evident that a pitched battle was to be expected over the question of politics as against colonization. . . .

For hours colonizers and politicals fought it out. Finally, when it became evident that there could be no peace between the factions the politicals withdrew, late in the evening of June 11th, to the Revere House. The next day's dawn looked in on a smoke-hung hotel room where the men from the East and the railroaders from the West put their heads together to work out the plans for a new and more orthodox Socialist Party. At 4:30 in the morning of the

12th, the delegates went through the silent hotel lobbies to get what sleep they could before meeting again at Hull House to round out the details of their organization.

The name of the new party was the Social Democratic Party of America. Its headquarters were to be at Chicago, its organ was to be the *Social Democratic Herald,* its officers Jesse Cox, chairman; Seymour Stedman, secretary; and Theodore Debs, treasurer. The delegates, the majority of them working men who had paid their own expenses and had to be back on their jobs, climbed onto trains satisfied that at length they were on their way to a party with a formula fitted to American conditions. They left the writing of the call for allies to the Chicago men, and a few days later labor papers throughout the country were printing it. It concluded:

> . . . The motto of the Social Democratic party is pure Socialism and no compromise. The party stands for united political action and proposes to enter the national field this fall by nominating candidates for Congress in every district in which the organization has a foothold. Candidates for municipal and state offices will also be nominated wherever possible and a thorough campaign made for a united Socialist vote throughout the country.
>
> Comrades, we feel that the Social Democratic Party is the party of the American Socialist movement. It stands for international Socialism and appeals for support on its merits as a class-conscious, revolutionary, social organization. The convention which resulted in separation has not weakened but strengthened the movement. There are now no longer warring factions, conflicting elements, but absolute unity and harmony, which are bound to bring success. Every loyal supporter of Socialist principles should promptly come to the front and join the Social Democratic Party of America. Never was the outlook more promising.
>
> East, west, north and south, comrades are with us and ringing messages of approval cheer us on the course we have taken.

> There is cause for neither doubt nor despondency. The cause of Socialism has again given evidence that it can not be sidetracked, that it is a living force in human affairs and that in due course of time it will abolish the slavery of capitalism and give us the co-operative commonwealth.

Here are the names of the men and women who signed the first official pronouncement of what is today the Socialist Party of America:

James F. Carey, Massachusetts.	G. A. Hoehn, Missouri.
Margaret Haile, "	C. F. Meier, "
Anna Ferry Smith, California.	Mary G. Jones, "
Eugene V. Debs, Indiana.	William Mailly, Tennessee.
Theodore Debs, "	A. S. Edwards, "
Hugo Miller, "	Victor L. Berger, Wisconsin.
Sylvester Keliher, Illinois.	Frederic Heath, "
Jesse Cox, "	Chas. G. Kuhn, "
Seymour Stedman, "	George Moerschel, "
George Koop, "	Jacob Hunger, "
M. Winchevsky, New York.	John Doerfler, "
Louis E. Miller, "	Oscar Loebel, "
I. A. Hourwich, "	F. G. R. Gordon, N. H.
I. Phillips, "	Charles R. Martin, Ohio.
Jos. Barondess, "	W. J. Carberry, "
William Butcher, "	Walter H. Miller, Pa.
Sam'l Levine, New Jersey.	

2

George Bernard Shaw has familiarized American readers with the early days of the British Labour Party, when he was preaching Socialism nightly in dingy halls to drab audiences. Mr. Archibald Henderson, one of "G. B. S.'s" many Boswells, refers patronizingly to those times as Shaw's "hole-in-the-corner days." Shaw, himself, pre-

fers to say that "Socialism made a man of me," having in mind the very real hardships suffered by a pioneering radical.

There is unfortunately no Shaw to chronicle the colorful activities of the American pioneers. Histories of the labor movement in the United States are mainly compendiums of programs, platforms, resolutions, convention proceedings. All the documents are available except the human documents. Conventional historians for their part, have chosen to ignore the Socialist and labor movement, so that to generations of school children such names as Altgeld, Debs, De Leon and even Gompers are meaningless. Until the publication of Beard's brilliant, the *Rise of American Civilization*, there were few general histories which so much as intimated that behind the posing statesmen, "the bullethead generals," the triumphant business imperialists, there was another world where men, women and children worked in fields, factories and shops. And that among those workers moved a band of radicals—zealots, if you like—who thought more about a mystical something they called "the cause" than they did about their personal fortunes, fame or even safety.

For example, Theodore and Gertrude Debs.

Theodore had married Gertrude Toy, the daughter of a Denver mining man. She brought to the Debs offensive an indomitable spirit, a sympathetic understanding and best of all, perhaps, an amazing capacity for hard work.

When the Social Democratic Party was finally launched, and Gene had sallied out to organize it, Theodore and Gertrude, with their three-year-old baby girl Marguerite, came up to Chicago to settle in a tiny flat on East Sixty-sixth Street.

Theodore Debs, Frederic Heath, Sylvester Keliher, Corinne Brown, daughter of a Chicago banker, Jesse Cox and Seymour Stedman hired a one-room office in the old opera house building on Washington Street, for $10 a month, and announced to all the world on October 1, 1898, that they were ready for business. The office was draughty, the paper was peeling from the walls, menacing cracks marched across the ceiling. "We started," says Theodore, "without a lead pencil or a plugged nickel." In and about Chicago they could count on the support of not more than fifteen active members. These pooled their resources and finally raised $75 among them. They were young, they had a compelling cause and a beloved leader. For them there was a joy in this common adventure such as no private enterprise could ever bring.

They met every day to "see if we were going to be alive on the morrow," as Theodore puts it. Within one month they were stony broke. Seymour Stedman, combining the practices of law and Socialism, managed to borrow $200 from Eugene Dietzgen, a genial Chicago business man whose father had been associated with Karl Marx. Back debts quickly consumed this windfall.

It was a bitterly cold day when the renting agent arrived for his overdue October rent. The national treasurer of the Social Democratic Party of America had exactly two dollars. Alfred S. Edwards, a little English socialist, editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, had a quarter. These were the entire cash assets of the organization formed "to abolish the slavery of capitalism and bring about the cooperative commonwealth."

To Edwards's vast surprise, Theodore, as a rule the

gentlest of men, assumed an expression of great ferocity at the sight of the agent. "See here," he shouted before the agent had a chance to speak, "didn't we take this place on the condition that we would have plenty of heat? And isn't it as cold as Greenland? You go back and tell your boss that if he doesn't provide us with heat The Social Democratic Party will move right out and find some place that's fit for human beings to work in."

The agent backed out, full of apologies, completely forgetting his mission. Pretty soon Theodore, grinning at the open-mouthed Edwards, disappeared. He came back an hour later with forty dollars. He had pawned his watch, an elaborately decorated gold affair which his father, Daniel, had given him. Socialism in America was, for the time being, saved. And the gold watch had made the first of many journeys to the pawn-shop where an old German sat in the window and, at the sight of Theodore coming down the street, called over his shoulder to a girl in the rear: "Giff the Socialist gentleman forty dollars."

"If Theodore had thrown that watch out of the window on Sixty-sixth Street," says Gertrude Debs, "it would have found its way straight to the hockshop in the Loop."

In the evenings Theodore, Keliher and Fred Heath would ride round and round the Loop elevated railway surreptitiously pasting Socialist stickers on car windows and station advertising signs. One memorable night they managed to get their stickers on the plate-glass windows of most of the big department stores on State Street.

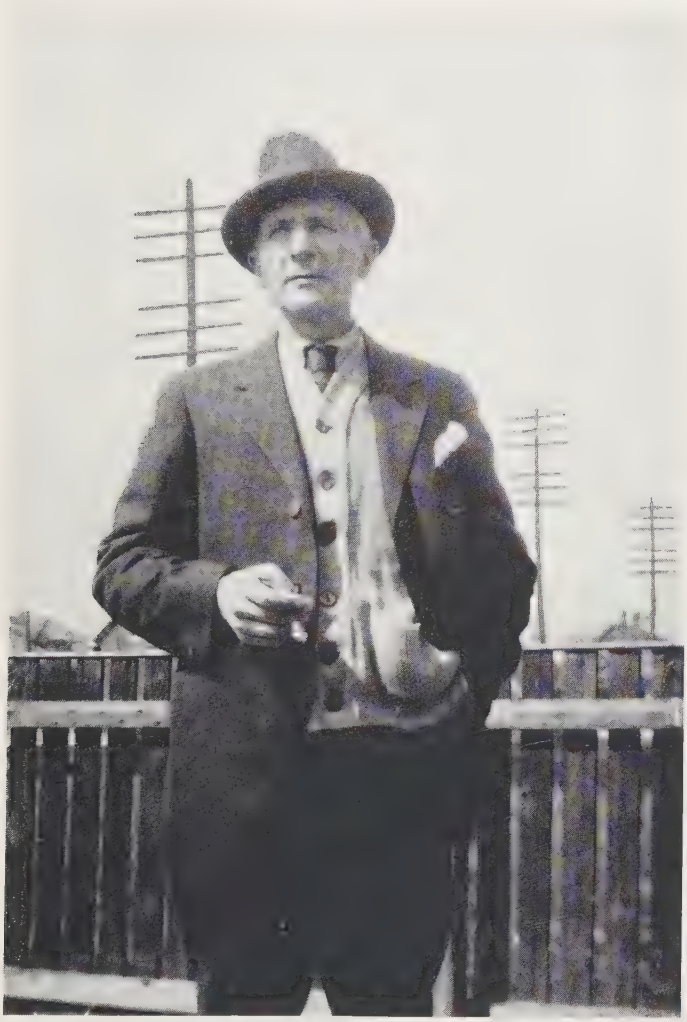
A friendly saloon keeper put up a magnificent free lunch in his place a block away from the office. He laid out the sausages and kraut at eleven in the morning. Five minutes

before eleven, the officialdom of the Social Democratic Party lined up behind the one comrade who happened to possess fifteen cents. As he slowly drank his schooner the others gorged.

In the Debs flat, Gertrude took care of the baby, miraculously concocted meals for Theodore and such hungry comrades as he picked up on his way home, and addressed the wrappers of 6,000 copies of the *Social Democratic Herald* in between times.

Christmas that year was a slim one. Theodore was far too proud to borrow any money from his father. On Christmas Eve, he and Keliher wandered around toy shops and finally picked out a sixty cent toy piano for the baby. Theodore had car fare and thirty cents over when he passed the cigar store where he had formerly bought cigars, but was now buying chewing tobacco for obvious reasons. As he slid a nickel over for his plug the cigar man showed him a lottery ticket. "It costs two bits." Theodore, with wild abandon, flung down his quarter. Three days later his number was posted in the rear of the shop. He had won $125. All the Socialist officials gathered at the Debs flat that night to partake of a feast which Gertrude had prepared. The ingrates drank toasts to the speedy downfall of a system which paid such rich rewards to the entrepreneur.

Soon the strain was eased a bit by the checks from Gene on the road. Theodore and Gertrude, today, as do all the pioneers, make light of the vicissitudes of those first days. They were afflicted with no martyr complex. It happened that there was a job to be done. And that they were the ones chosen to do it. If they suffered real privation, what of it? The people they were working for were worse off, for there was no saving vision among them, perishing.



THEODORE DEBS

The beloved brother.

3

Cheering news came from the East in the fall of 1898. In the shoe centers of Massachusetts, James F. Carey, Lewis H. Scates and John C. Chase, all devoted Socialists, had been elected on the party ticket. The shoe workers sent Carey and Scates to the Massachusetts Legislature and made Chase mayor of Haverhill. While the total vote cast for the party of Debs was but 12,411 as compared with the 82,000 for the De Leonite, there was evidence from all parts of the country that the workers were turning from both utopianism and De Leonism to the more matter-of-fact politician tactics of the newcomers. The Socialist Party of Texas came in on June, 1899, and so effectively had Gene and the other organizers done their work that when the first national convention of the new party was held on March 6, 1900, at Indianapolis, it was reported that there were 226 active branches with 4,536 members.

By the time of the Indianapolis convention, the newspapers of the country had become aware of the existence of the Social Democratic Party as an important factor in the labor world. They sent their political correspondents to Indianapolis, and the stories of the convention were featured on the front pages.

Gene himself had given impetus to this publicity by a widely reprinted article which he contributed to the *New York Journal* of March 7, 1900. In it he wrote:

> The Social Democratic Party is not a reform party, but a revolutionary party. It does not propose to modify the competitive system but abolish it. An examination of its platform shows that it stands unequivocally for the collective ownership and control of all the means of wealth production and distribution —in a word, Socialism. . . .

> It is now organized in twenty-five different states and is spreading rapidly over the entire country. Its progress has been greatest in the states of Massachusetts, Wisconsin and Washington. These three states are marked for early conquests. . . .
>
> The Social Democratic Party has no interest in any of the so-called issues over which capitalists fight sham battles. We stand first, last, and always for the collective ownership of all the means of production and distribution, and we will press forward unceasingly until we secure them, thereby liberating the race and solving the problem of the centuries.

The convention cheered the opening speech of Gene's, and then marked time. The delegates were awaiting the arrival of new allies from the East.

Following a series of confused scrimmages over the control of the *Volkszeitung,* the opponents of De Leon, still left inside the S. L. P., had held a convention of their own at Rochester in February, 1900, adopted a platform, nominated Job Harriman, a California lawyer for President of the United States; named Max Hayes, a Cleveland editor for Vice President, and made friendly gestures towards the Debs party. Three representatives from this rump Rochester convention appeared at Indianapolis on March 7th. They were Harriman, Hayes and Morris Hillquit of New York.

Hillquit was a lawyer, thirty years old, a forceful speaker, and an accomplished strategist. He had come to America from Riga, Russia, in 1886. As a lawyer he had rendered indispensable aid to the needle workers in their struggle against the sweatshops. As a revolutionist, he had interpreted the works of the Continental Socialists to his American comrades. As a politician he had fought the rigidities of De Leonism.

Now, sensing the desire of the mass of the delegates for unity of all like-minded Socialists, he proposed immediate

amalgamation with the Rochester group. His speech, now coldly logical, now afire with its demand for a solid Socialist phalanx, won the rank-and-filers. They were all for joining forces with the Rochester men forthwith. But Gene and Victor Berger and the other Westerner leaders were more cautious. They succeeded in electing a committee of nine to confer with a like committee of the Rochester faction and discuss the terms of unity.

Then they proceeded to the Presidential nominations.

The only name the delegates would listen to was that of Debs. But Gene shook his head at the cheering and begged them to take some one else. He was in earnest when he had said on his return from the Indiana legislature that he would never again run for office. He felt that he could do more for Socialism as an organizer than a candidate. The speeches of the Easterners with their constant references to an esoteric Socialist ideology of which he knew little, made him uneasy. He felt that he did not have sufficient philosophic background to be the national spokesman for Socialism. (He did not know that it was his personality, far more than his philosophy, which made him so beloved of "all sorts and conditions of men.")

He went out of the convention hall and arm-in-arm with Theodore walked about the streets of Indianapolis until early morning, in a turmoil of indecision.

When he came onto the floor the next day the delegates decided the question for him.

"Debs Forced to Take It," ran the headline in the *Indianapolis Press* of March 9th, and the Social Democratic Party went to the nation with Debs as its nominee for President, Harriman for Vice-President (a sop for the Rochester group) and the following platform:

The Social Democratic Party declares its object to be the establishment of a system of co-operative production and distribution through the restoration to the people of all the means of production and distribution, to be administered by organized society in the interest of the whole people and the complete emancipation of society from the domination of capitalism.

To accomplish this it proposed:

1. Revision of the Constitution in order to remove the obstacles to full and complete control of government by all the people irrespective of sex.
2. Public ownership of all industries controlled by monopolies, trusts, and combines.
3. Public ownership of railroads, telephone, telegraph, transportation, water works, gas and electricity.
4. Public ownership of gold, silver, copper, lead, coal, iron, and other mines; of oil and gas wells.
5. Reduction of hours of labor in proportion to increasing of production.
6. Public works and improvements for unemployed.
7. All useful inventions to be free to all, the inventor to be remunerated by the public.
8. Labor legislation to be made national instead of local.
9. Accident, unemployment and old age pensions.
10. Equal civil and political rights for men and women and abolition of all laws discriminating against women.
11. Adoption of initiative and referendum and recall.
12. Abolition of war as far as United States are concerned and introduction of international arbitration.

For the farmers there were these planks:

1. No more public land to be sold, but to be utilized by the United States or the state directly for the public benefit or to be leased to farmers in parcels of not over 640 acres.
2. Construction of grain elevators, magazines, and cold storage buildings by the government to be used by farmers at cost.
3. Postal, telegraph and telephone service to be united so that every postal and railroad station shall also be a telegraph

and telephone center. Telephone service for farmers at cost.

4. Uniform postal rate for agricultural products on railroads.
5. Public credit for improvement of roads and soil and for irrigation and drainage.

It seemed like fair sailing. Though the De Leonites in their press hurled derisive brickbats at the new alliance, the unity meeting held in New York in March 25th accepted Debs and Harriman as candidates, took the Indianapolis platform with but few additions, and chose Springfield, Mass., for party headquarters. There remained, however, the matter of a name. For some occult reason the naming of a new radical party has invariably led to the fiercest contention. It was so in 1900, and in 1930 those who would change the name of the Socialist party to something else are still vociferous.

Each group had its name, the Debs followers had already worked up a sentiment about the Social Democratic Party name, while the Rochester group favored United Socialist Party. Both names were submitted to a referendum, although the followers of Debs contended that only the name Social Democratic Party was to be submitted. Such apparent trivialities developed very shortly into a most acrimonious falling out. Even Gene, hater of factionalism as he was, wrote in the *Social Democratic Herald* of April 21st:—

> I take my stand against union of the parties on the basis proposed by the New York conference. . . . For years the official organ of the Socialist Labor Party (De Leon's *People*) had drilled it into their members that the Social Democratic Party consisted of a lot of freaks, frauds and fakers without a redeeming feature. They were fairly saturated with the virus of hate and contempt. Hundreds of them, members of the anti-De Leon party, and I speak advisedly, still rankle with that

> feeling which, to even the superficial observer is but illy concealed. It is this sort of training in the school of intolerance, fanaticism and hate which has given the party a spirit irreconcilably in conflict with that of the Social Democratic Party which by its highminded toleration has appealed so successfully to the American people in behalf of Socialism that its complete supremacy as the Socialist party was only a question of months, while at every step of its progress its members were derided as "half-baked Socialists" by the very men who now, we are assured, insist upon union. The spirit is still there, whatever may be said to the contrary.*

In Milwaukee, Victor L. Berger, who was building a compact political machine of his own, steamed into the fray on the side of the anti-unionists, calling Harriman and Carey "ward politicians" and Morris Hillquit "a thorough class-conscious lawyer of New York." De Leon rubbed his hands. This miniature civil war raged until June when the necessity for a truce, at least during the Presidential campaign, compelled the two factions to get together, and a joint campaign committee was formed.

Gene turned from the fury of factionalism which he heartily hated, to stumping for Socialism as translated in terms of his own idealism. Since 1896 Bryan had run desperately after respectability. He thought to find it in an appeal to the church people, and while Hanna trotted out his prosperity machine again, and hailed McKinley as the only savior for the propertied, it was evident that there was no longer any radical fire left in the Nebraskan, and that there was really little for the East to fear in his assaults upon the new imperialism. Edgar Lee Masters, who, unlike most first-rate poets, has a keen political sagacity, tells of Bryan's conversion to conservatism of a sort in his poem *The Cocked Hat:*

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* *Labor and Farmer Parties,* Nathan Fine, pages 199–200.

Do you remember that banquet at the Tremont
In '97 on Jackson's day?
Bryan and Altgeld walked together
Out to the banquet room.
That's the time he said the bolters must
Bring fruits meet for repentance—ha! ha! Oh, Gawd!
They never did it and they didn't have to,
For they had made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,
Even as he did, a little later, in his own way.
Well, Darrow was there that night.
I thought it was terribly raw in him,
But he said to Bryan, there, in a group:
"You'd better go back to Lincoln and study
Science, history, philosophy,
And read Flaubert's Madam something-or-other,
And quit this village religious stuff.
You're head of the party before you are ready
And a leader should lead with thought."
And Bryan turned to the others and said:
"Darrow's the only man in the world
Who looks down on me for believing in God."
"Your kind of a God," snapped Darrow.

Others beside Darrow turned with relief from the vacilations of Bryan to the downright radicalism of Debs. "Bryan is not our Rienzi. Who is that man? There are thousands who think his name is Eugene V. Debs," wrote a columnist in the *Columbus Citizen.* The coal miners in Pennsylvania entering into their titanic struggle under the leadership of young John Mitchell heard Gene speak in Scranton and Wilkes-Barre and all through the hard coal region, and many of them saw a true Rienzi in him. The railroaders cheered when Gene, at their meetings, said: "You railroad men are told that I am too radical, that I am dangerous, that as a 'leader' I am a failure, and a good many other things, but the time will come when you will know that from first to last I was true to you, and because of that

very fact the corporations you work for warn you against me. . . . Time will tell, and I can wait."

For the most part, as was to be his custom for the remainder of his life, Gene contented himself with Socialist generalities, couched in Ingersollian phrases, with talk of a new world, the emancipation of the workers, the happiness of the little children of the future. In the speeches delivered during his first Presidential campaign one discovers the lines of the oratorical pattern which Gene was consistently to follow to the end. Only when he came to consideration of a candidate for Vice President on the Republican ticket, did Gene wax fiercely specific. Theodore Roosevelt had written approvingly of Cleveland's intervention in the Pullman strike.* Gene told his audiences that he had seen Roosevelt, dressed up like a cowboy, come onto a train in the West. "I did not like him," said Gene with a tightening of his lips, "and I see no reason for revising my opinion."

Between Debs and the pugnacious young New Yorker who was so soon to step into McKinley's boots, a political feud developed which had in it something of the personal. Within a few years Roosevelt was to offer a diluted version of the doctrines which Gene was now expounding, and as Gene was now contemptuous of the halfway stand of Bryan, so later on he was to denounce Roosevelt's poaching upon Socialist preserves with a most strenuous invective.

When they counted the votes that fall, and announced McKinley's second victory, Gene had received 96,878 whereas the Socialist Labor Party vote had dwindled to

* Gene had carefully clipped an article of Roosevelt's appearing in *The Forum* in 1895, in which T. R. had said: "Had it not been for the admirable action of the Federal government, Chicago would have seen a repetition of what occurred during the Paris Commune, while Illinois would have been torn by a fierce social war."

34,000. The workers had evidently recognized the Social Democratic Party as the spokesman for such revolt as was in them.

The size of the vote, victories in Massachusetts, the practical elimination of the Socialist Labor Party, above all, the pressure of rank-and-file sentiment upon the leaders, compelled the calling of another unity conference after the election. This was held at Indianapolis on July 29, 1901, and was successful in composing the differences between the Eastern and Western groups. "It was made up almost entirely of young men, full of life and vigor, rich with promise and determined to set America on fire." *

It revealed the fact that already the fledgling party had sprouted Right and Left wings. The Rights stood steadfastly by political action. They were proud of the fact that their representatives in the Massachusetts legislature had introduced twenty-five bills. The Lefts shouted: "Did you get the bills passed?" and were all for dropping the immediate demands in the party platform. The only immediate demand they wanted was the "complete surrender of the capitalist class."

Morris Hillquit, inveterate centrist, steered the convention deftly through these angry waters by saying that he wanted the platform, "to express the cardinal principles of Socialism, not only our ultimate aim and views, but also our present action, our activities." On the vote in favor of including immediate demands, eighty-two delegates voted "Yes," thirty "No."

The original planks for the farmers were dropped out of the platform. The farmers, the Socialists blithely decided,

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* *Labor and Farmer Parties,* Nathan Fine, page 204.

were not members of the working class and as a consequence no especial attempts were to be made to enlist them under the red flag. It was some years before farm planks again appeared in a Socialist platform.

A constitution was drawn up, a national committee formed and St. Louis was chosen as the headquarters of the party with Leon Greenbaum of that city as national secretary. The word "Democratic" was dropped from the party name. In New York State a row had been raised by the Democrats and while the Socialists went on the ticket there in 1900 under the designation of Social Democratic Party, after the election the Socialists took the simpler title—Socialist Party.

Theodore and Gene went back to Terre Haute well satisfied with the results of the unity conference. The former had nursed the Socialist infant through its most crucial days, the latter had given it national recognition.

4

Certain it was, that the submerged and dispossessed in all the new imperialist America recognized in Gene a champion. Every train that came to Terre Haute brought those insistent that Gene hear their stories of tyranny and oppression. So great were the demands upon him, that he and Theodore moved their office to a remote room in the rear of a building on Wabash Avenue. The doorbell at the Eighth Street home was clamorous with the ringing of workers come to tell their tragic experiences to a man they knew was sympathetic. Terre Haute became the Mecca for "the pilgrims of adversity." On summer nights Gene could

not enjoy his pipe in an easy chair on the front porch without the interruption of suppliants.

It was at this time that his generosity overflowed, and he never got it back within the bounds laid down by more prudent men. To an out-of-work A. R. U. veteran he gave the gold watch which the grateful firemen had presented to him at the time of his resignation. One night he came home minus a new overcoat, and making shame-faced apologies to Katherine that "he had met a poor devil who was shivering with the cold and who had been out of work for months." Naturally, he was an easy victim for that crew of panhandlers who hang on the fringes of every radical movement with hard-luck stories about the sufferings imposed upon them, by the capitalist system. To his protesting friends he ruefully admitted his weakness, swore that in the future he would be adamant, and forthwith proceeded to slip a dollar bill into the hand of the next out-of-work coal-digger or railroader who came up on the Terre Haute porch.

Whenever distant speaking engagements did not make it impossible, he spent his week ends reading to Daniel and lingering with real gusto over his mother's dining table. Marguerite had lost none of her cunning as a cook, and this Gene celebrated, in a parody of James Whitcomb Riley's *When the Frost Is on the Pumpkin:*

When the rabbit's on the table,
With the noodles mountain high:
When the jaws begin to water
As the picture greets the eye:
O 'tis then the hunter's family
Is a hale and happy group,
When the frost is on the pumpkin,
And the rabbit's in the soup.

CHAPTER XII

WITH THE RANK AND FILE

GENE went through the South preaching unionism at a time when the word was practically unknown below the Mason and Dixon line. At every meeting he urged the workers to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor and gave them directions for getting in touch with the secretaries of their respective unions in the North.

He had tried in vain to persuade his American Railway Union men to open the doors to the Negroes. But they had balked at this. Now he said frankly to his Southern audiences, "If they had only admitted these porters and waiters to membership in the American Railway Union, there would have been a different story of that strike, for it would certainly have had a different result."

There was muttering at such boldness. In Montgomery, Ala., where Gene was to speak at the opera house, he found the color line sharply drawn. "It so happened," he said long after, "that the colored people had worked most faithfully and energetically for the success of that meeting, and when they appointed a committee which came to my hotel and notified me that they were to be excluded, I said, 'We will go there together, and if you are excluded, so will I be excluded; if you cannot be admitted, I will not speak.' Well, there is one thing that the 'superior' white man loves better than he hates the Negro, and that is the coin. The

manager had $50 coming for the use of the opera house, and he wanted the money, and when I said I wouldn't speak unless he opened the doors to the colored people, he changed his mind very reluctantly to receive his $50."

In Atlanta, Negroes were kept off the floor of a labor meeting where Gene spoke. He noticed that all the applause was coming from the galleries. He stopped short and said to the chairman: "The intelligence of this audience is evidently monopolized by the galleries."

"If he had had intelligence enough to understand what I said I might have been lynched that night," said Gene.

In one of the last long speeches of his life, delivered in Harlem before an audience of negroes, he said:

"One reason why I became a Socialist was because I was opposed to this cruel discrimination against human beings on account of the color of their skin. I never could understand it. When I traveled over the Southern States organizing the workers, what a desolate, unpromising situation it was! I made my appeal to them wherever I went, to open their doors to the colored workers, upon equal terms with the white workers, but they refused. Poor as most of them were, they still felt themselves superior to the colored people." *

On his way back, in West Virginia, he talked bareheaded to the workers under a fierce mid-summer sun. At the close of his speech he said:

"The end of class struggles and class rule, of master and slave, of ignorance and vice, of poverty and shame, of cruelty

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* This speech was delivered at the Commonwealth Casino, in New York City on October 30, 1923. Frank R. Crosswaith, Negro Socialist organizer, who presided, was discharged from a job he had held for ten years for arranging the meeting.

and crime—the birth of freedom, the dawn of brotherhood, the beginning of Man. This is Socialism." He turned, took a few steps and would have fallen had not the chairman caught him. For the rest of his life, he suffered from severe headaches as the result of that sunstroke.

As soon as the doctors would allow it he was out on the road again. This time he went West.

2

When William D. Haywood, for the last time, turned off the air on his machine drill in the crosscut of a mine, four thousand feet below Silver City, Idaho, in 1898, there came to the surface of the world of Western labor one of its most colorful characters. Haywood was "Big Bill" to the men of the Western Federation of Miners. In that industrial organization of copper miners from Montana, lead miners from the embattled Coeur d'Alenes of Idaho, gold miners from Cripple Creek and mill men and smelter men and veterans of the great strike of the Cloud City miners at Leadville in 1896, where Gene had spoken, Haywood was already a looming figure. A huge-fisted, stoop-shouldered, lumpy man with a dead-white face made sinister by the loss of an eye, Big Bill, was by all odds the best organizer the mineral miners had.

Edward Boyce, president of the Western Federation, and Haywood were both Socialists, having joined the party after the unity convention in Indianapolis. They asked Gene to come on and talk Socialism and the eight-hour day to the delegates at the Denver Convention of the W. F. M. in 1901.

Gene brought with him Father Thomas J. Hagerty, one

of the first Catholic converts to Socialism, a big, black-bearded, be-spectacled scholar, who was to attempt to offset the attacks on the new party already being launched by church officials.

They foregathered in a tiny hotel, the miners, Big Bill spitting methodically, Ed Boyce, tall, slender with sharp-chiselled features, and the two visitors.

"I remember one evening when Debs had got into his pajamas. He was long and lanky and bald-headed and sat in the middle of the bed with his feet crossed under him and a pipe in his mouth. He was spinning yarns about his past experiences," wrote Haywood in his autobiography.*

The miners in their convention came out flat-footedly for Socialism. A vigorous educational campaign was planned. Debs and Hagerty went through the mining regions urging the drillers to join their union and vote the Socialist ticket.

Gene loved this work. The Western Federation crowd were rank-and-filers after his heart. They were a relief after the smooth-spoken eastern intellectuals. They had a fighting, industrial union. They had sent word to him during the American Railway Union strike that they were with him. They had seceded from the American Federation of Labor in 1897. That they had no use for Sam Gompers did not tend to weaken Gene's liking for these outspoken proletarians. "When Gompers came to the building where the convention was being held, it was amusing to see the big broad-shouldered men of the West taking the measure of this undersized individual that called itself the leader of labor." †

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* *Bill Haywood's Book*, page 95.

† *Ibid*, page 73.

Haywood wrote in a vindictive mood, "This squat specimen of humanity certainly did not personify the membership of the American Federation of Labor. Sam was very short and chunky with a big head that was bald in patches, resembling a child suffering from ringworm. He had small, snapping eyes, a hard, cruel mouth, wide, with thin drooping lips, heavy jaws and jowls. A personality vain, conceited, petulant and vindictive."

However much Haywood and his swaggering miners may have been repelled by Gompers, other workers saw in him the authentic marks of leadership. In 1901 the American Federation of Labor had about a million members. No other organization of workers in America, not even the Knights in their heyday, had made such a showing in such a brief period of existence. Solidarity to a considerable degree had been achieved. It "was not the emotional solidarity of the Knights of Labor, but a solidarity expressing itself in the co-operation of the national trades-unions within the federation and with the growing industrial unionism. Alongside developed a recognition of partnership with the employers—not the partnership of individual employee with his employer, as preached by the 'social harmony' advocates—but the partnership of the wage-earning class, organized in a national employers' association. This recognition of partnership took full cognizance of the existing antagonism between the two classes, but proposed to bridge it by the trade agreement." *

The "recognition of partnership," was solemnized by the formation of the National Civic Federation in 1900. This was a group, composed of representatives of capital, labor

* *History of Labor in the United States,* John R. Commons, page 519–20.

and the public, which was to "show that organized labor cannot be destroyed without the debasement of the masses" and that "the twin foes of industrial peace are the anti-union employers and the Socialists, and that the former are unconsciously promoting that class hatred which the latter boldly advocates."

At the round-table of this organization, Gompers sat down cheek by jowl with Mark Hanna, the first president of the Federation, and John Mitchell of the miners fraternized with August Belmont. The sight was too much for Gene. He was driven far to the Left, when, in defending the Western miners for forming The American Labor Union in 1902, he said:

> Why did they start a dual organization? This is made the burden of the opposition to the Western unionists who refused to be assimilated by Mark Hanna's Civic Federation. . . .
>
> And this objection may be dismissed with a single sentence. Why did not those who urge it remain in the Socialist Labor Party and carry on their agitation there? Why split the Socialist movement?
>
> Is it not wiser to curry favor with numbers than to stand by principles?
>
> When the American Federation of Labor sheds its outgrown pure and simple policy, when it declares against the capitalist system and for union, class-conscious action at the ballot box; when it relegates leaders to the rear who secure fat offices for themselves in reward for keeping the rank and file in political ignorance and industrial slavery, when it shall cease to rely upon cringing lobbying committees. . . .
>
> Socialists boring from within will not object to a little help from the outside. In time the two progressive forces will meet and work of redemption will have been accomplished.

In such moods he was all the headlong revolutionist, letting expediency go hang. What if Gompers and his federation did give to the workers trade agreements which meant

job security, wage insurance? Was the birthright of labor worth selling for a mess of civic federation pottage? Though more cautious trades-unionists among the Socialists were outspoken in their criticism of Gene's support of dual unionism, seeing in it a disastrous repetition of the De Leon tactics, Gene continued a running fight against the "pure and simple unionism" of Gompers to his dying day.

Gompers, for his part, at an American Federation of Labor convention, baited by the Socialist delegates, shouted at them: "Economically you are unsound, socially you are wrong and industrially you are an impossibility." In his autobiography Gompers explained his changed attitude towards Gene from the Pullman days when he was acclaiming him: "When Debs began to discount his judgment in favor of his emotions, he ceased to play a constructive part in the labor movement." *

From the pragmatic viewpoint, at any rate, taken some years after the deaths of these two hard-hitting antagonists, the Gompers formula has been vindicated. American labor has accepted his philosophy of business unionism "pure and simple" and rejected Gene's vision of class-conscious workers, organized industrially, voting for their own political party's candidates.

3

By the time of the next national convention in 1904, the relationship between Debs and his party organization had taken on a curious complexion. It was more in the nature of a *modus vivendi* between Gene and those in charge of the

* *Seventy Years of Life and Labor,* Samuel Gompers, page 405.

party machinery than the natural relation between a leader and his followers.

In the first place, Gene had come to a deep-seated distrust of leadership. He had seen what power did to men risen from the ranks of the workers. Time and again he disclaimed any ambitions for leadership. "If I do anything worthy of keeping my name alive," he wrote to Seymour Stedman once, "I prefer that it shall be done as a private in the ranks, and not by having my name associated with some public office or with what may seem to be the desire of some public office."

Again, Gene, who had been such a stickler in the early days of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen for regularity and organization discipline, had now a certain contempt for the solemnity with which so many of the intellectuals within his party treated their wordy resolutions, manifestoes and by-laws. He did not need De Leon's fate to teach him the fallacy of rigidity. His inborn tolerance made it possible for him to be contained in the presence of heterodoxy.

His contacts with the rank and file were kept fresh and poignant through his speaking trips. He repeated to them what he said to his party officials, that he was no "Moses to lead them out of a capitalist wilderness," and that their salvation was in their own hands. He had this great advantage, that at any time he could appeal to the rank and file confident of a verdict in his favor. And he knew that the officialdom of the party realized this, and that even when they resented his deviations from regularity, there was nothing much they could do about it. As a result, while there was grumbling at headquarters, Gene was going about the country expounding a peculiarly Debsian theory of So-

cialism without much regard to the rules and regulations laid down in the Constitution.

"Hail to the revolution!" cried Debs at a time when a more modulated tone would have sounded sweeter in the ears of the moderates. The protagonists of evolutionary Socialism, the American Fabians, were constantly being upset by such ejaculations from their official standard bearer as: "At the dawn of every day my hearty hail goes out to all the workers of the world. They are my comrades, and I covet no higher honor than to share their lot and no greater wealth than to have their respect and love. . . . All hail the sons and daughters of this glorified international host, with whom I proudly march to victory or death!"

In Milwaukee, Victor Berger, in New York, the intellectuals, looked on such pronouncements with atrabilious eyes. Among themselves they admitted that Gene was the most magnificent agitator since Wendell Phillips, but they were heartily relieved when Debs made it very evident that he wanted no share in the framing of principles or platforms or the day-by-day detail work of staff strategy.

It was an intellectual, Dr. George D. Herron, from the New York delegation, with a black beard waving over a large white bow tie, who nominated Gene at the Chicago convention in 1904. Gene's rank-and-filers (one hundred and twenty out of the two hundred delegates, native-born, and seventy-eight members of trades-unions), made a tremendous racket when Herron sat down. Ben Hanford, a working printer of New York who had won his spurs in the party by organizing among the striking coal-miners in Pennsylvania, was nominated for Vice President. The day after his nomination Gene came up to Chicago, and of his appearance before the convention the Utah *Crisis* wrote:

It was an inspiring sight today when the bald and lanky nominee entered the hall and appeared on the platform to deliver his speech accepting the honor accorded him by the assembled comrades. The delegates rose as one man, hands were waved, hats thrown high in the air, chairs were pounded on the floor, and cheer after cheer was given for the idol of the hour. The windows shook with the enthusiasm, the very floor rocked beneath the wildly demonstrative multitude, and for fully ten minutes pandemonium reigned. Through it all, calmly impassive, with no sign of a smile on his strong, classic face, the recipient of all this homage stood viewing the scene beneath, and when the throng finally, and with much reluctance, permitted him to speak, it was to listen to as powerful and wise an address as ever fell from the lips of any candidate of any party in any country. He speaks slowly, does Eugene Debs; he weighs his words carefully and so constructs his sentences that no one can, by any possibility misconstrue his meaning. He doesn't say a great deal, but what he does say is very much to the point and his remarks are punctuated with frequent applause and laughter, as when he arraigned the Democratic party today in these words: "Then there is the Democratic party, which hasn't stock enough left to declare its own bankruptcy." After listening to him speak for a half hour and noting the cordiality and magnetism of the man in all his intercourse with his fellows, it is not difficult to account for his popularity with the rank and file, nor to question his fitness for the leadership of the greatest movement which American politics has ever known.

4

When the political writers, in the fall of 1904, were through exclaiming over Roosevelt's popular majority of nearly 2,000,000 votes, the largest ever accorded a candidate, they made note of the 402,400 votes cast for Debs and Hanford, and articles on "the rising tide of Socialism" appeared in conservative publications. The Socialists were jubilant. At headquarters in Chicago, the national secretary, William Mailly, who had succeeded Greenbaum, was

buried under a mountain of letters asking about the aims and purposes of the party and the chances for joining. The Socialists had definitely arrived as a third party, a threat of no inconsiderable proportion to the Democrats demoralized by the disastrous rout of Judge Alton B. Parker. There were those who freely predicted that within a decade, at least, the Socialists would take the place of the Democrats in opposition to the conservatives of the country gathered under Republican standards.

The Socialists had developed within a surprisingly short time a masterful technique of propaganda. They had four monthly magazines, the *International Socialist Review*, *Wilshire's Magazine*, *The Comrade* and the *Southern Socialist*. Twenty weeklies published in English preached Socialism in terms understandable of the wayfaring man. There were three German dailies the *New Yorker Volkzeitung*, *Philadelphia Tageblatt* and *Cincinnatier Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and seven German weeklies, and, in addition, organs printed in French, Polish, Italian, Hungarian and Jewish.

Outstanding among all these publications, was the *Appeal to Reason*, owned by J. A. Wayland, and originally (under the name of the *Coming Nation*), devoted to such utopian schemes as The Ruskin Co-operative Colony of Tennessee. Wayland's genius for promotion and the able editorial policies of Fred D. Warren, had built the circulation of the *Appeal*, published at Girard, Kansas, close to 300,000. Old-timers in the Socialist Party look back wistfully today upon the *Appeal* with its short paragraphs, its sensational exposures, its "grass-roots" editorials. Wayland used all the devices known to the none too scrupulous circulation hunters of those days, special prizes, bonuses, etc.,

and his huge circulation was due, in no small part, to his low yearly subscription price of twenty-five cents. Every Socialist speaker carried *Appeal* subscription blanks in his pocket. And the quarters poured in.

Gene had been speaking on Chautauqua circuits with temperance lecturers, Shakespeare commentators and bringers of sweetness and light generally. The fees for Chautauqua lectures were not, as was the case with Socialist meetings, dependent upon the size of the contribution taken from the audience. They came regularly and at the height of the season Gene's income averaged $100 a week. He accepted with relief, however, Wayland's offer that he act as special correspondent for the *Appeal*. Gene was free to express himself on any subject that came into his active head, and he took full advantage of his assignment. His fiery contributions brought to the office at Terre Haute threatening letters in nearly every mail. Their authors, for the most part anonymous, illustrated their outpourings with pictures of blood-dripping daggers, exploding revolvers and fuse-sputtering bombs. "Debs! You want to hear the truth? Well, here it is. You are a liar, thief, bandit, traitor and murderer. You're not fit for American citizenship and ought to be deported, and if you don't shut up, you will be, or you'll wake up in hell. Beware! You are playing with fire when you provoke the American Eagle. An American. (signed.)"

Such letters were a part of Gene's daily life as an agitator up to the time that he was again sent to prison. Strangely enough, he received no such threats because of his anti-war stand.

Very much on his mind at this time was the struggle of the Western miners against gunmen, militia and injunc-

tions. He wrote frequently begging his readers to send money for the relief of the miners. He received a telegram urging him to speak in Victor, Col., in the Cripple Creek district where a desperate strike was in progress and where, over the protest of a citizens' committee, militia had been sent in. There were bull pens there where the arrested strikers were herded together under unspeakable conditions. Strangers entering town were searched at the station by militia and company guards. Gene's friends warned him not to go to Victor. He took the next train west.

The news of his coming had run on before him, and at stations along the way, men came into his car to tell him that he was taking his life in his hands if he spoke at Victor. No one met him at the station at Victor. On the platform a man with two revolvers strapped to his belt looked closely at Gene, and followed him up the street to the little hotel. Gene paid no attention to him. There was no novelty for Gene in the sound of following footsteps.

Towards evening, some of the miners came in predicting trouble at the meeting. But Gene spoke for more than an hour, and there was no trouble. Outside the hall, on his way to the train, he noticed the two-gun man leaning against a telegraph pole across the street. "Oh, that's Charlie," said the chairman who was accompanying Gene. "He's the best shot in all this district. He's been covering you ever since you hit town. He has read some of your pieces in the *Appeal to Reason,* and he let the word get around that if anybody was thinking of doing anything to Gene Debs, that man had better make arrangements with an undertaker."

Bayonets and bull pens, the ruthless abrogation of all civil rights, the general reign of terror in the metalliferous

mining regions—these gave birth to a radicalism among the native American miners which, at first, expressed itself in sporadic dynamiting of mine property, and then took organizational form under the leadership of The American Labor Union, the name adopted in 1902 by the Western Labor Union. The backbone of this organization was the Western Federation of Miners, and by 1905 Haywood, Charles Moyer, president of the organization, and other miners' leaders were corresponding with officials of various unions (for the most part, paper organizations) as to the possibilities of forming a rival organization to the American Federation of Labor. This would "unite the working people of America in correct revolutionary principles, regardless of any general labor organization of past or present, and only restricted by such basic principles as will insure its integrity as a real protector of the interests of the workers."

A call for a convention signed by some thirty radicals, among them Gene, was sent out in January, 1905, and received immediate response.

The first convention of what was to be the Industrial Workers of the World, the "I. W. W.," was held in Chicago on June 27, 1905. It was a proletarian rank-and-file convention. De Leon, with a group of his followers, representing the dying Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance (which De Leon hoped could be revived by affiliation with this new party), stood out in contrast to the diggers, the smelter men, the railroaders representing small bodies independent of the brotherhoods, anarchists and Gene's Socialists who had come with Gene, hopeful that out of this convention might rise a new and genuine industrial union.

Haywood lumbered up to the speaker's stand and greeted the delegates with the salutation of "Fellow work-

ers," the words with which the Industrial Workers of the World still greet their diminished audiences. "This is the Continental Congress of the working class," boomed Haywood. "We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working-class movement that shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism. There is no organization, or there seems to be no labor organization, that has for its purpose the same object as that for which you are called together today. The aims and objects of this organization shall be to put the working-class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to capitalist masters. . . ."

Debs, who was seated between Mother Jones, already a veteran of many industrial battles in the mining fields, and Lucy Parsons, widow of Albert Parsons of Haymarket fame, rose to tell the delegates:

> They charge us with being assembled here for the purpose of disrupting the union movement. It is already disrupted. And if it were not disrupted, we would not behold the spectacle here in this city of a white policeman guarding a black scab and a black policeman guarding a white scab, while the trades-unions stand by, with their hands in their pockets, wondering what is the matter with union labor in America. We are here today for the purpose of uniting the working class, for the purpose of eliminating that form of unionism which is responsible for the conditions as they exist today.
>
> The trades-union movement is today under the control of the capitalist class. It is preaching capitalist economics, it is serving capitalist purposes. Proof of it, positive and overwhelming, appears on every hand. All of the important strikes during the last two or three years have been lost. . . .
>
> There is certainly something wrong with that form of unionism which has its chief support in the press that represents capi-

talism; something wrong in that form of unionism that forms an alliance with such capitalist combinations as the Civic Federation, whose sole purpose is to chloroform the working class while the capitalist class goes through their pockets. . . .

I believe that it is possible for the delegates here assembled to form a great sound economic organization of the working class based upon the class struggle, that shall be broad enough to embrace every honest worker, yet narrow enough to exclude every faker.

Gene had no more attentive listener that day than Daniel De Leon, who watched every gesture of the lank agitator, intent on ferreting out, if he could, the reasons why Gene's rambling discourse laid such a spell upon the convention. In his autobiography, Haywood, in a few sentences, gives the reaction of the rank-and-filer to the two speeches—Gene's, idealistic, emotional, loosely thrown together; De Leon's, which was to follow, intellectualized, sophisticated, cold. Big Bill wrote:

Sitting in front of Debs was Daniel De Leon of the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance, with badger-gray whiskers, a black spot on the chin. He had been eyeing his old antagonist, Debs, furtively and seemed charmed by what the leader of workingmen had to say. For years there had been a wide difference of opinion between Debs and De Leon. They represented extremes in the Socialist movement. I could feel what this difference meant when De Leon began to speak; he was the theorizing professor, while Debs was the working man who had laid down his shovel on the locomotive when he took up the work of organizing the firemen. Debs's ideas, while not clearly developed, were built upon his contact with the workers in their struggle. De Leon's only contact with the workers was through the ideas with which he wished to "indoctrinate" them, to use his own word.*

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* *Bill Haywood's Book,* pages 183–4.

The reception accorded this latest venture of Gene's on the part of Victor Berger, Hillquit, Stedman and other party moderates was anything but warm. Berger had no great love for the American Federation of Labor. He made Gompers unhappy by arising at conventions of that body, of which he was a member, with resolutions sharply critical of the A. F. of L. administration. But Berger, drawing his Socialist inspiration from the state ownership programs of the well-disciplined Social Democrats of Germany, could see no hope in the motley proletarians gathered under the red flag of the I. W. W. He had a deep distrust of dual unionism. The American Federation of Labor, he argued, might not be modelled after the blue-prints of scientific Socialism, but it was evidently closer to the heart's desire of the bulk of the American skilled workers than Big Bill's new union. So, while Berger called Gompers "an empty, self-complacent old fool," * he refused to join the I. W. W.

Between Gene and the Milwaukee schoolteacher, there was an odd relationship. Gene had always displayed a naïve humility towards those whom he regarded as his intellectual superiors. He felt keenly his lack of a formal education. He told George Kirkpatrick, one of the Socialist intellectuals, that on the night when the class with which he had started in the Old Seminary in Terre Haute was graduated, he had wept bitterly at the thought that he had quit school so early. When Berger showed Gene the rows on rows of books on economics, sociology, history, marching round the walls of the famous library in the Berger home at Milwaukee, Gene was duly impressed. At such times, he

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* *Labor and Farm Parties,* page 252.

let Victor scold him soundly for his radical aberrations. Then Gene would run into a group of railroaders and pretty soon he would be telling them about the rising of a red revolutionary sun while they stood around swearing that Gene was a prince among men.

The shrewd Lincoln Steffens sensed something of this teacher and pupil attitude, when he came upon Berger and Gene together after a Socialist meeting in Milwaukee. In an article in *Everybody's Magazine* (October, 1908), he wrote:

> The interview proper was at the house of Victor L. Berger, "the bear"; leader of the Wisconsin Socialist party, which has forceful minorities in the state Legislature and the Milwaukee city council. Berger is the man that made a Socialist of Debs, and the teacher, a most aggressive personality, took a most aggressive part in his pupil's interview, which was fortunate. For Socialism seems to be a science. It is an interpretation of history; a theory of the evolution of society; no mere, man-dreamed Utopia, as I have thought, but a faith, a calculation that, since the economic forces which have brought man from savagery up to the present state of civilization are continuous, we can foresee the next inevitable step. But it takes no little study of economics and much reading in the mass of Socialist literature to speak with authority on the subject, and Berger—with a library coveted by the University of Wisconsin—is an acknowledged authority.
>
> "We believe," said Debs (for example), "that Socialism would come without the Socialists."
>
> "Ach," said Berger, with his strong German roll, "we know it. Can't we see it?"
>
> "Yes," said Debs. "The trusts are wiping out the competitive system. They are a stage in the process of evolution: the individual; the firm; the corporation; the trust; and so, finally, the commonwealth. By killing competition and training men to work together, trusts are preparing for the co-operative stage of industry: Socialism."

"Then you would keep the trusts we have and welcome others?" I asked.

"Of course," he answered, and Berger nodded approval.

"They do harm now," I suggested.

"Yes," said Debs, but Berger boomed: "No; not the trusts. Private owners of the trusts do harm, yes; but not the trusts."

"Well, but how would you deal with the harm?"

"Remove 'em," snapped Berger, and Debs explained: "We would have the government take the trusts and remove the men who own or control them: the Morgans and Rockefellers, who exploit; and the stockholders who draw unearned dividends from them."

"Would you pay for or just take them?"

Berger seemed to have anticipated this question. He was on his feet, and he uttered a warning for Debs—in vain.

"Take them," Debs answered.

"No," cried Berger, and, running around to Debs, he stood menacingly over him. "No, you wouldn't," he declared. "Not if I was there. And you shall not say it for the party. It is my party as much as it is your party, and I answer that we would offer to pay."

It was a tense but an illuminating moment. The difference is typical and temperamental; and not only as between these two opposite individualities, but among Socialists generally. Debs, the revolutionist, argues gently that, since the system under which private monopolies had grown up was unjust, there should be no compromise with it. Berger, the evolutionist, replied angrily that it was not alone a matter of justice, but of "tactic"; and that tactics were settled by authority of the party.

"We (Socialists) are the inheritors of a civilization," he proclaimed, "and all that is good in it—art, music, institutions, buildings, public works, character, the sense of right and wrong —not one of these shall be lost. And violence, like that, would lose us much." Berger cited the Civil War: "All men can see now that it was coming years before 1861. Some tried to avert it then by proposing to pay for the slaves. The fanatics on both sides refused. We all know the result: slavery was abolished. But how? Instead of a peaceful evolution and an outlay of, say, a billion, it was abolished by a war which cost us nearly ten billion dollars and a million lives. We ought to learn from history, so I say we will offer compensation; because it seems just to

present-day thought and will prove the easiest, cheapest way in the end. And anyhow," he concluded, "and besides, the party, it has decided that we shall offer to pay."

And Berger was orthodox. Looking up the point afterward, I found that the "authorities" are on his side; the party will offer compensation for property taken by eminent domain.

"Debs," said Berger, "Debs, with the soft heart—Debs is the orator." And he meant "only" an orator. Berger loves his pupil's "soft heart," but he loves Socialism more, and so during the interview, while Debs was trying to convert me, "the bear" was intent upon the orthodoxy of my report; and while Debs's other friends sat close up around him, under the light of the lamp, to protect the man, Berger hovered about in the shadow, anxious, on guard, to protect—"the cause."

While Gene might let himself be patronized by Berger on the "tactic" of Socialism, he was stung by the uppish manner with which the Berger group treated Haywood and the Industrial Workers of the World. There were, after all, human affairs not found between the covers of those books in the Milwaukee library—hungry children, miners on strike, blacklisted railroad men. Gene had seen the bull pens in Colorado, Berger had not. The exact manner with which the trusts of the country were to be taken over seemed of minor importance to a man who had watched bayonets flash along the Coeur d'Alenes.

Gene's articles in the *Appeal*, his speeches on Socialism, took on a redder hue.

"I find myself," he said, "breaking away from some men I have been in close touch with and getting in close touch with some men from whom I have been widely separated."

Had Gene at that time cared to press, inside the party, the issue of revolutionary against evolutionary Socialism, had he not deliberately refrained from any appeal to the rank and file, he could have taken the great majority of

Socialists with him down the road to the Left. But more and more the very suggestion of factionalism was coming to distress him. It was his political weakness and his personal charm that he would make no assertions of leadership. It became increasingly easy for those who prided themselves on their "scientific socialism" to speak of Gene as "a wonderful organizer," and then to add, "but, of course, Gene is no student." And as these strengthened their control of the party's machinery, much of the fire and color of the first days vanished. So that, as in Milwaukee, where the Socialists finally gained power, it was difficult for a casual observer to say how a Socialist regime might differ from that of any honest reform administration.

In Chicago, in the fall of 1905, Gene made a number of speeches on *Revolutionary Socialism,* underscoring the "class struggle" theory. "We are engaged today in a class war: and why? For the simple reason that in the evolution of the capitalist system in which we live, society has been mainly divided into two economic classes—a small class of capitalists who own the tools with which work is done and wealth is produced, and a great mass of workers who are compelled to use those tools. Between these two classes there is an irrepressible economic conflict. Unfortunately for himself, the workingman does not yet understand the nature of this conflict, and for this reason has hitherto failed to accomplish any effective unity of his class. . . .

> The workingman today does not understand his industrial relation to his fellow workers. He has never been correlated with others in the same industry. He has mechanically done his part. He has simply been a cog, with little reference to, or knowledge of, the rest of the cogs. Now, we teach him to hold up his head and look over the whole mechanism. If he is employed in a certain plant, as an industrial unionist, his eyes are opened. He

takes a survey of the entire productive mechanism, and he understands his part in it, and his relation to every other worker in that industry. The very instant he does that he is buoyed by a fresh hope and thrilled with a new aspiration. He becomes a larger man. He begins to feel like a collective son of toil.

Then he and his fellows study to fit themselves to take control of this productive mechanism when it shall be transferred from the idle capitalist to the workers to whom it rightfully belongs.

In every mill and every factory, every mine and every quarry, every railroad and every shop, everywhere, the workers, enlightened, understanding their self-interest, are correlating themselves in the industrial and economic mechanism. They are developing their industrial consciousness, their economic and political power; and when the revolution comes, they will be prepared to take possession and assume control of every industry. With the education they will have received in the industrial workers they will be drilled and disciplined, trained and fitted for industrial mastery and social freedom.

In these Chicago speeches he was foreshadowing a major problem of the craft-unionist of these latter days of mass production. At a time when the industrialists were just beginning to grasp the lessons taught them by Frederick W. Taylor and the pioneer production men, Gene was picturing the plight of a worker engaged in a repetitive task, unaware of any relationship to the industry as a whole or to his fellow workers.

If he had followed up the clues which he uncovered then, he might well have devised a trades-union formula far more realistic than any which the Socialists had yet proposed.

But events in the West ended all theoretical explorations. Ex-Governor Steunenberg of Idaho was killed by a bomb at his home on December 30th, 1905. On the night of February 17, 1906, Big Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer, George

Pettibone and other officials of the Western Federation of Miners were arrested in Denver, taken in separate carriages under heavy guard to the railroad station, and hurried by special train to Boise, where they were locked up in the penitentiary charged with the assassination of Steunenberg.

The deportations roused Gene to fury. He sounded his Rienzi call, "Arouse, Ye Slaves," in the *Appeal*. It was the most revolutionary document ever to come from his pen. After reviewing the kidnapping of the miners he wrote:

> It is a foul plot; a damnable conspiracy; a hellish outrage.
>
> The governors of Idaho and Colorado say they have the proof to convict. They are brazen falsifiers and venal villains, the miserable tools of the mine owners who, themselves, if anybody, deserve the gibbet.
>
> Moyer, Haywood and their comrades had no more to do with the assassination of Steunenberg than I had; the charge is a ghastly lie, a criminal calumny, and is only an excuse to murder men who are too rigidly honest to betray their trust and too courageous to succumb to threat and intimidation.
>
> Labor leaders that cringe before the plutocracy and do its bidding are apotheosized; those that refuse must be foully murdered.
>
> Personally and intimately do I know Moyer, Haywood, Pettibone, St. John and their official co-workers, and I will stake my life on their honor and integrity; and that is precisely the crime for which, according to the words of the slimy "sleuth" who "worked up the case" against them, "they shall never leave Idaho alive."
>
> Well, by the gods, if they don't, the governors of Idaho and Colorado and their masters from Wall Street, New York, to the Rocky Mountains had better prepare to follow them.
>
> Nearly twenty years ago the capitalist tyrants put some innocent men to death for standing up for labor.
>
> They are now going to try it again. Let them dare!
>
> There have been twenty years of revolutionary education, agitation and organization since the Haymarket tragedy, and if

an attempt is made to repeat it, there will be a revolution and I will do all in my power to precipitate it.

The crisis has come and we have got to meet it. Upon the issue involved the whole body of organized labor can unite and every enemy of plutocracy will join us. From the farms, the factories and stores will pour the workers to meet the red-handed destroyers of freedom, the murderers of innocent men and the arch-enemies of the people.

Moyer and Haywood are our comrades, staunch and true, and if we do not stand by them to the shedding of the last drop of blood in our veins, we are disgraced forever and deserve the fate of cringing cowards.

We are not responsible for the issue. It is not of our seeking. It has been forced upon us; and for the very reason that we deprecate violence and abhor bloodshed, we cannot desert our comrades and allow them to be put to death. If they can be murdered without cause so can we, and so will we be dealt with at the pleasure of these tyrants.

They have driven us to the wall and now let us rally our forces and face them and fight.

If they attempt to murder Moyer, Haywood and their brothers, a million revolutionists, at least, will meet them with guns.

They have done their best and their worst to crush and enslave us. Their politicians have betrayed us, their courts have thrown us into jail without trial and their soldiers have shot our comrades dead in their tracks.

The worm turns at last, and so does the worker.

Let them dare to execute their devilish plot and every state in this Union will resound with the tramp of revolution.

Get ready, comrades, for action! No other course is left to the working class. Their courts are closed to us except to pronounce our doom. To enter their courts is simply to be mulcted of our meagre means and bound hand and foot; to have our eyes plucked out by the vultures that fatten upon our misery.

Capitalist courts never have done, and never will do, anything for the working class.

Whatever is done we must do ourselves, and if we stand up like men from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from Canada to the Gulf, we will strike terror to their cowardly hearts and

they will be but too eager to relax their grip upon our throats and beat a swift retreat.

We will watch every move they make and in the meantime prepare for action.

A special revolutionary convention of the proletariat at Chicago, or some other central point, would be in order, and, if extreme measures are required, a general strike could be ordered and industry paralyzed as a preliminary to a general uprising.

If the plutocrats begin the program, we will end it.

Roosevelt, alarmed by the furore which the deportations caused, wrote to Senator Lodge of Massachusetts:

> The labor men are very ugly and no one can tell how far such discontent will spread. There has been during the last six or eight years a great growth of socialistic and radical spirit among workingmen and the leaders are obliged to play to this or lose their leadership.*

In speaking of the Haywood case he called Big Bill and his sympathizers "undesirable citizens." The phrase became famous. It did nothing to enhance Gene's admiration for the Colonel. Gene could not write about Roosevelt with restraint. He shrilled at the mention of his name.

5

From such bitterness, Gene turned to a tragedy at home. In the spring of 1906 his mother died. Gene was desolate. He brooded over the loss of the great-spirited woman whom he had so frankly idolized. Jean Daniel withered away after his Marguerite's death, and in the fall of that same year they played the *Marseillaise* over his coffin. Gene wrote of that time:

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* *The Rise of American Civilization,* Beard, page 549.

> I was in Superior, Wisconsin, when the blessed soul of my mother started on her long journey, and the world has never been the same to me since. I had just finished my lecture to a crowded opera house with my mother in my heart and her image before my eyes, bowed a moment to the applause, and turned about to face Ellis Harris with a telegram in his hand, and the instant I looked at him I *knew* my mother was gone. I cancelled my engagements and started home with a heart of lead. The light had gone out of the world. I could feel only the chill hand of death clutching at my throat and the impenetrable darkness. . . . When I think of how very much my sainted mother and father did for the happiness of others and how little they got out of life for themselves I feel as if "I could weep my spirit from mine eyes. . . ." The best man ever born never lived long enough to even begin to pay the unpayable debt he owed his mother. The memory of my . . . mother has kept my heart warm and my soul erect through all these trying years.

Gene was fifty-one. He stooped a little; four deep lines were on his forehead; around the mobile mouth were clefts that gave his face in repose an expression of sadness. But when he was animated, when some story of injustice or heroism or humor touched him, the blue eyes sparkled, the forefinger came into action as he jabbed home his points. He seemed all ageless energy. And his capacity for work was unabated.

When he was at home, five hours sleep sufficed him. He would be up at sunrise on his way to Theodore's house, on the outskirts of town. First to greet him would be one of Theodore's hunting dogs, wriggling ecstatically at the sight of an old friend. Then Theodore would come out and the brothers would go along the prairie with great striding steps, the dog darting happily before them. Before any other establishment in town was opened for business, the Debs propaganda factory in the little office in the Whitcomb block was going full tilt. There were letters from

party headquarters, four- and five-page long-hand letters from socialist novitiates seeking Gene's advice on sociological matters which troubled them, letters from the West, heavy with the woes of evicted strikers, letters from socialist fathers announcing that they had named their first-born "Gene," letters from socialist children begging for Gene's autograph. All of these Gene answered, often at great length, dictating his replies to Theodore. By noon some impression was made on the bulk of the mail, and after a hurried meal there was the afternoon for the preparation of speeches, leading articles to be sent off for the *Appeal* and for the other unofficial Socialist papers to which Gene was a constant contributor. Then home for supper with Katherine, there to find, six evenings out of seven, guests who had "just dropped in because I said to my wife we can't go past Terre Haute without paying our respects to Comrade Debs."

The occasions on which he could sit down with a book in his comfortable library were rare. Nevertheless, he managed somehow to read largely in history (American and French history especially), politics, philosophy and poetry. Notably poetry. Though his own poetical attempts were of no consequence, he had a critical curiosity that made him acclaim the writings of the younger men at a time when the romantic mood was still on America, and it was the fashion to scoff at the rebel youngsters. To be sure, this faculty was blunted by his love for propaganda. Let the most obscure poetic protestant raise his voice, however weak and ill-attuned, against the *status quo* and more likely than not he would get a letter from Gene congratulating him on his effort. But it is to be noted that he resented with heat a letter from that sturdy Socialist editor, Charles Ervin,

gently intimating that Gene "slopped over" in his praise of mediocre verse-mongers. Ervin didn't understand, Gene insisted. It wasn't a question of good poetry or bad. The writer's heart was in the right place, and if he were encouraged, who knows but some day he might turn out something worth while?

When Gene went to Indianapolis, he would join James Whitcomb Riley wandering under the heat of a Hoosier sun, a large yellow umbrella and a straw hat with maple leaves beneath the brim, on his way to the Dennison House bar. The two would talk poetry for hours, mourn the loss of Gene Field, and exchange opinions on the first rough verses of that talented youngster, Carl Sandburg, as contrasted with the romanticism of the older men. Markham's *Man with the Hoe* still had an immense vogue among both social and literary rebels, and Gene knew the sonorous lines by heart.

6

For Gene, 1907 was a comparatively placid year. He cut down his speaking engagements and went between Terre Haute and the *Appeal* office at Girard where he had a room in a boarding-house near the newspaper plant. Every detail of Haywood's trial for the Steunenberg murder was wired to him by the *Appeal* correspondents in the courtroom where William E. Borah, who had been attorney for a number of lumber companies and who was to go to the Senate from Idaho, headed the prosecution, and Clarence Darrow made one of the greatest speeches of his career in his final plea for Haywood. The acquittal of Haywood was celebrated in all the labor centers of the country. He was

the hero of the hour. The Socialists from Coast to Coast cheered him at crowded meetings.

In the meantime, however, factionalism was disrupting the I. W. W. The imprisonment of Haywood, despite the wide publicity which this gave the new union, rows between officials of the Western Federation of Miners and finally the rough ascendancy of revolutionary radicals who had no patience with political action of any sort—all combined to split the union. In 1908, the delegates to the I. W. W. convention, bellowing "Hallelujah, I'm a bum! bum!" bade derisive farewell to the departing De Leonites shocked by such "bummery." The Western miners, up to now the largest legitimate trade-union inside the I. W. W., likewise withdrew, later to affiliate with the A. F. of L. The out and out syndicalism of the I. W. W., their hell-for-leather, anti-political philosophy of direct action, attracted to their tattered standards the migratory workers and the most recent and most exploited immigrants; but as a rival union to the A. F. of L. they were no longer to be considered.

The revolutionaries in both the I. W. W. and the Socialist Party may have had little cohesiveness, their tactics may have been footless, but they won the support of a whole generation of younger social heretics.

Jack London, who had marched with Kelly's Army back in 1894, told a group of distressed Yale University faculty members and delighted undergraduates:—

> I received a letter the other day. It was from a man in Arizona. It began "Dear Comrade." It ended "Yours for the Revolution." In the United States there are 400,000 men, of men and women nearly 1,000,000 who begin their letters, "Dear Comrade" and end them "Yours for the Revolution. . . ." The revolution is here and now. Stop it who can."

London cheered the appearance of *The Jungle* by the twenty-eight-year-old Upton Sinclair:—

> Here it is at last! The book we have been waiting for these many years! The *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery! Comrade Sinclair's book, *The Jungle!* And what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for black slaves, *The Jungle* has a large chance to do for the white slaves of today. It is essentially a book of today. The beautiful theoretics of Bellamy's *Looking Backward* are all very good. They served a purpose and served it well. *Looking Backward* was a great book. But I dare to say that *The Jungle,* which has no beautiful theoretics, is even a greater book. It is alive and warm. It is brutal with life. It is written of sweat and blood, and groans and tears. It depicts not what man ought to be, but what man is compelled to be in this our world in the twentieth century.

Sinclair, London, Harry Laidler, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and others in the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (today, the League for Industrial Democracy) were rallying the rebels in the colleges. There was an ardor, of a religious nature, in all the radical propagandists of those days.

7

While Gene might have had no heart for pressing his revolutionary Socialism upon the party moderates, no such qualms could stay the rank and file of youngsters coming to Chicago for the 1908 national convention. For one week on the floor of the convention hall Rights and Lefts fought it out. In the end the moderates kept their "immediate demands" intact. For the first time, other Presidential candidates than Debs were named by Socialist delegates. When delegate P. H. Callery had finished with a spread-eagle speech, nominating Gene, Seymour Stedman rose to name

A. M. Simons, whose writings on economics had gained him a certain fame among the intellectuals. Stedman's rôle was a delicate one. He knew that he could make no speech to a convention as enthusiastically Debsian as this one, in opposition to Debs's nomination, so he took the tack that Gene should not be allowed to run because of his failing health. Said Stedman: "From the time when he was sunstruck down in Virginia and all through, if you please, the great campaigns that followed, we watched him, and we watched him frequently pale under the terrific strain of those two great fights. Some few months ago, some of you may not know it, but there was an operation that took place upon his throat. If in this campaign he ever attempts to make a talking campaign he will probably close his existence so far as . . ." The delegates thundered "No!"

There was hissing as Stedman continued to describe Gene's physical ailments. Victor Berger followed with the nomination of Carl D. Thompson, saying "we do not want to become a one-man party in the sense that the Democratic Party is a Bryan Party." Ida Crouch Hazlett of Montana nominated James F. Carey. And then they came to the roll-call of the votes by delegations. When the vote was counted, Debs had 159, Carey 16, Thompson 14, Simons 9. Berger, who had voted for Thompson, moved to make the nomination of Gene unanimous. Hanford again was Gene's running mate.

There was apparently little doubt as to Gene's physical fitness on the part of those who planned the campaign of 1908. At all events, they laid out a speaking trip of tremendous proportions. They conceived the idea of hiring a special train which they dubbed "The Red Special," and from which Gene was to speak in every state where an au-

dience could be drummed up. It was an ingenious publicity stunt, but a grilling punishment for the candidate. Since Bryan went out in 1896, no such intensive campaign had been so much as contemplated by any Presidential aspirant. The "Red Special," consisting of a coach, a sleeper, and a baggage car, rolled out of La Salle Street station in Chicago on the morning of August 31, 1908, and arrived in Davenport that night for a large out-of-door meeting after a series of meetings along the way. For the next sixty-five days Gene and Theodore were on wheels. Under the best of circumstances, life on a sleeper meant misery for these two rangy men, and now, at the end of a red hot summer, they were "cabin'd, cribbed, confined" to the point of torture.

At every stop, welcoming committees stormed aboard the train, and headed straight for the sleeping compartment where Gene, Theodore and Stephen Reynolds, who had come along as official chronicler of the tour, had their quarters. Of these the comrades took possession. They sat on piles of pamphlets on the floor of the car or hung together in the aisle, deaf to Theodore's plea for some little privacy. After the night meetings, two of the three occupants of the compartment would crawl into their berths, while the third undressed, usually in the presence of enthusiasts who had decided to come along until the next stop in the morning. By the time that they had arrived at the Pacific Coast, the funds for the "Red Special" had run out and Mahlon Barnes, secretary of the party, wired from Chicago, that it would be necessary to end the tour. At a conference held in Gene's compartment, Gene cast the deciding vote for going on. Edward Lewis, of Portland, Ore., volunteered to go through the Western states selling literature and guaranteed a return of $800. Help came from unexpected

quarters. "Jimmie Higginses," the term first used by Ben Hanford for the obscure rank-and-filers who set up platforms, hand out literature, take up collections, and in general do the dull, grinding work of Socialist propaganda, rallied from all sides to the rescue of the stranded caravan. Among these was Tom Mooney, a young and energetic iron molder, now serving a life sentence in California for a crime of which he is universally conceded to be innocent.

The contributions taken at a big meeting at Los Angeles, money sent in from well-to-do sympathizers, and those who, while they had no special interest in Socialism, had a deep admiration for Gene, finally made it possible for the special to go ahead. It was true that Gene's throat had troubled him for some time past, and under the strain of speaking from five to six times a day, with a big mass meeting at night, his voice often failed him entirely. At some of the smaller towns Theodore would substitute for Gene. And so alike were the brothers spiritually, and physically, that in many instances the substitution was never detected by the shouting crowds at the station platforms.

A typical day on the "Red Special" was October 22, 1908, with this schedule:

Louisville, leave 6:00 A. M. B & O Ry.			
Seymour	Arrive	8:15	Speech
Medora	"	9:15	"
Mitchell	"	10:25	"
Loogootee	"	12:00	"
Washington	"	1:00	"
Petersburg	"	2:15	"
Glezen	"	3:00	"
Evansville	"	5:30	(Evening meeting)

The "Red Special" received a magnificent "press." At

"THE RED SPECIAL"

Gene speaking from train platform in 1908

every town the local newspaper men came aboard to receive lessons in elementary Socialism from Theodore, while Gene was leaning far over the rail of the rear platform holding out his arms to the farmers and workers below him. "When the 'Red Special' bearing Eugene V. Debs and his party reached here at 6:30 o'clock last night, there were several hundred men and women waiting. . . ." said the *Kansas City Times* on September 3rd. "They swarmed into the cars to see the candidate. But Mr. Debs with his secretary had shut himself up in his private office. He would see no one—and small wonder at that, for he had made ten speeches, some of them forty minutes in length, since leaving Des Moines at six o'clock in the morning. . . . The train was getting more behind schedule at each special stop but there was no other graceful way out of the predicament when a crowd of farmers surrounded the train yelling 'Debs!' At little towns the 'Red Special' band tried to put off the enthusiasts with a lively rendition of the *Marseillaise*, but there was nothing doing in that line. The French anthem only made them worse."

In the last days of the campaign, Gompers charged that Gene's "luxurious" entourage was being financed by the Republicans who hoped to draw away from Bryan such progressive support as was still left him. Gene promptly challenged Gompers to make good his charges. When it was discovered that Gene was receiving but $3 a day for his personal expenses including meals, and that the "Red Special" was travelling on the nickels and dimes of poor people for the most part, nothing more was heard of these charges.

The expedition drew up at Terre Haute the night before election, after a clamorous swing through the Eastern cities where such able managers and speakers as George Goebel

of New Jersey, Charles Ervin of Philadelphia, and Algernon Lee, Julius Gerber and Meyer London of New York, had packed halls waiting for Gene. (The meeting at the New York Hippodrome was so large that a nearby theatre had to be taken for the overflow.) At Terre Haute, where Big Bill Haywood joined him, Gene made the last speech of the campaign with all the energy and fire of his first addresses. He had held up the red banner at a time when the country as a whole was seeking respite from the nerve-wracking vagaries of Roosevelt, in the mild platitudes of Taft. The "full dinner pail" slogan had had its effects again. Bryan had been unable to convince the nation that his platform differed markedly from that of the Republicans. The campaign had been an issueless one, so far as the old parties were concerned. Taft started for the White House, an easy winner. Gene went to bed in Terre Haute, satisfied that he had done his job. The Socialist vote that year was 420,973, a slight increase over the 1904 vote.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RISING TIDE

WHEN Charney Vladeck, one of the finest spirits among the latter-day Socialists, first came to this country in 1908, he found that Debs had become a household god among the Russian Jews of New York, huddled in the tenements of Allen, Essex and Hester Streets.

"The picture of Gene was on their walls alongside those of Sir Moses Montefiore, the Rabbi of Lubawich, 'Goan of Vilna' and other heroes of these immigrants. For them Debs was the liberator, the first who had come to them from the ranks of the American workers, holding out his hands and saying 'I am your brother.' They had respect and admiration for radicals of their own race. But they worshipped Debs."

And Gene, touched by the devotion of these men and women who "had spelled out their Marx in the hideous misery of sweatshops" brought to them his richest emotional gifts. Whenever he spoke in New York, there were red flags on the stage and red hangings on the balconies, children going up to Gene with roses, the mass thunder of "The International," and then Gene—tender, brooding, his golden voice rising and falling, as he talked of the joys of the coming co-operative commonwealth.

The New York Gene came to know so well was the city which sprawled to the east and south of Fifth Avenue, the

city of Second Avenue with its bearded philosophers arguing over their tea glasses on soft spring nights, of the darkened hovels beneath the shadows of the "L" on Allen Street, of the masses of sweated workers struggling gallantly for those good things of life which they created but which were denied them and their children.

With Cahan, whose *Forward* was the spokesmen for these inarticulate ones, with Meyer London, gentle champion of every oppressed needleworker, with Jacob Panken, picturesque and eloquent defender of the workers, Debs would go from a roaring meeting in the old Madison Square Garden, to long discussions of Socialism overseas, in the offices of the *Forward,* or the room of a proud Jewish worker on the east side. On the island which is the entry port for the radicalism of Europe, Gene, who never crossed the Atlantic, learned his internationalism.

When the *New York Call* began as a daily Socialist paper in 1908, Gene welcomed its appearance with delight. For the fifteen years of its hectic life, he was a faithful contributor to its columns.

When the American pioneer in workers' education, The Rand School of Social Science, first opened its doors in 1906 to "offer to the general public facilities for studying the principles, purposes, methods and problems of Socialism and organized labor," Gene rejoiced. Today the beautiful portrait of Gene by Willy Pogany looks down on the youngsters of a new generation of Socialists meeting at the School in the Debs auditorium.

The man from the "Valley of Democracy," with a hint of the Hoosier drawl in his voice and the traditions of the American labor movement bred in the bone, found among the New York immigrant workers some of the most beloved

of his army of friends from coast to coast. "They ask so little," he said, "and give so much."

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Gene's days were given over now to the sole business of propaganda by speech and pen. He went among mining camps of "Egypt" in Illinois, that flat, desolate, delta country of corn-fields and tipples; he journeyed southward through Oklahoma where Oscar Ameringer and Dan Hogan and a laughing, hard-driving band of rebels was goading tenant-farmers into revolt; he spoke before chilly audiences of intellectuals in Boston; before whooping Socialist locals in log cabins in the Rockies; parlor meetings of Christian Socialists, of whom Big Bill Haywood said scornfully, "They are drunk on religious fanaticism and are trying to sober up on economic truth."

He would stop to fire off a shot at Gompers. When Sam was reported to have wept during his trial in the Buck's Stove case, Gene wrote:—"Gompers has been mumbling his apologetic excuses like an old woman in the grip of a constable."

He stepped out of his usual rôle of non-interventionist in matters of Socialist Party policies when in 1910, at a policy convention, it was suggested that the Socialists favor the exclusion of Asiatic immigrants from America. He sent a hot protest to the convention against excluding anybody. It took all of Hillquit's diplomacy, however, to defeat the nationalists inside the party ranks, and persuade the organization to go on record as maintaining that: "The party is opposed to the exclusion of any immigrants on account of their race or nationality."

Gene wrote copiously in defense of the McNamara brothers on trial for the dynamiting of the *Los Angeles Times* building in 1910. William Burns, the detective who arrested the McNamaras ("kidnapped them" Gene charged), was so alarmed by the Debs articles that he solemnly informed an audience at Columbia University that Gene had employed 200 men to assassinate him (Burns). To this Gene answered: "The trouble with Burns is that he now realizes that an indicted kidnapper is an object of loathing and scorn, even among pickpockets and Bowery blackguards and he is now rolling his eyes in the convulsion of a persecuted martyr."

When the McNamaras confessed, Roosevelt, in an article called *Murder Is Murder*, had his innings with Gene. But the latter stuck stubbornly to his point that he regarded the "system which had created the McNamaras as being as guilty as those two workers." *

Gene had come to the time when most radicals either grow mellow or tired, either modulate their critical tone or leave the field to younger fighters. Gene did neither. If

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* "The McNamaras are products of capitalism," Gene wrote to Dr. L. B. Woodstock of Scranton, Pa. "They have not been taught in the refinements and delicacies of things. If you want to judge John McNamara you must first serve a month as structural iron worker on a skyscraper, risking your life every minute to feed your wife and babies, then be discharged and blacklisted for joining a union. Every floor in every skyscraper represents a workingman killed in its construction. It is easy enough for a gentleman of education and refinement to sit at his typewriter and point out the crimes of the workers. But let him be one of them himself, reared in hard poverty, denied an education, thrown into the brute struggle for existence from his childhood, oppressed, exploited, forced to strike, clubbed by the police, jailed while his family is evicted and his wife and children are hungry, and he will hesitate to condemn those as criminals who fight against the crimes of which they are the victims of such savage methods as have been forced upon them by their masters."

anything, his power to move men increased with the years of his life.

He never ceased to harass those whom he had marked out as the enemies of his people, to comfort and nourish his own. Something close to mystical passed between him and his audiences so that long afterwards men write of the time they first heard Debs as they would of a sudden, soul-shaking conversion. Not a word that he said may remain in their memories, but they tell with manifest conviction—the most unemotional of them—how Gene changed them by the magic of his love. "The trouble with Debs is," Lincoln Steffens wrote, "that he puts the happiness of the race above everything else; business, prosperity, property. . . . It is the feeling he conveys that he feels for his fellow men; as he does, desperately."

Children, who are said to be judges of such matters, must have recognized Gene's sweetness of spirit for they went straight to him. He had none of his own, so he showered his affection on Theodore's girl and a son of one of his sisters. In Terre Haute or Girard, processions of youngsters marched along with him on the way to feasts of ice-cream and cookies which Gene was forever providing. He had an uncanny memory for names and in his letters he would send his love to all the younger members of the household. Or, more often than not, there would be a separate letter to the children. These are reverentially cherished today by many who have no adult sympathies with the cause Gene preached. Pictures of Gene surrounded by children hang in Socialist meeting places all across the continent.

"The bitter cry of the children" of the poor rang in his ears.

"How is it," he asked an audience in Girard, "with the babe that is born in Mott Street, or in the lower Bowery, or in the east side of New York City? That is where thousands, tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of babes are born who are to constitute our future generations.

"I have seen children ten years of age in New York City who had never seen a live chicken. The babes there don't know what it is to put their tiny feet on a blade of grass. It is the most densely populated spot on earth.

"You have seen your beehive—just fancy a human beehive of which yours is the miniature and you have the industrial hive under capitalism. If you have never seen this condition, you are excusable for not being a Socialist. Come to New York, Chicago, San Francisco with me; remain with me just twenty-four hours, and then look into my face as I shall look into yours when I ask: "What about Socialism now?" These children by hundreds and thousands are born in sub-cellars, where a whole grown family is crowded together in one room, where modesty between the sexes is absolutely impossible. They are surrounded by filth and vermin. From their birth they see nothing but immorality and vice and crime. They are tainted in the cradle. They are inoculated by their surroundings and they are doomed from the beginning. This system takes their lives just as certainly as if a dagger were thrust into their quivering little hearts, and let me say to you that it were better for many thousands of them if they had never seen the light . . ."

3

The delegates to the 1912 convention of the Socialist Party were of a different sort from those who had chanted revolutionary hymns at previous gatherings. Responsibility had had its sobering effects. Milwaukee had elected Emil Seidel mayor in the spring of 1910 and sent Berger to Congress in the fall of that year. Milwaukee was on every one's lips. The delegates saw the Wisconsin elections as the first in a series of conquests that were destined to

sweep the nation. Of the inauguration of Seidel, Cahan wrote: "A thrill passed through the Socialists present. It was one of those moments which are a landmark in one's life. There were tears in some eyes, tears of the highest joy known to man. That which had been cherished as a dream was beginning to look like reality."

In Pennsylvania and Ohio and other industrial centers throughout the country there were Socialist victories. George R. Lunn was elected mayor of Schenectady in 1911, saying, "I am just as radical as Eugene V. Debs." He chose Walter Lippman for his secretary, Charles Proteus Steinmetz for his educational adviser and started on a political career that was to bring him safe within the folds of the Democratic Party and to a job as public service commissioner for the State of New York.

So many and unexpected were the Socialist triumphs of these days that Robert F. Hoxie, the economist, made a study of the municipal victories dividing them into seven distinct types and concluding:

> There seems to be a definite law of the development of Socialism which applies both to the individual and to the group. The law is this: The credalism and immoderateness of Socialism, other things being equal, vary inversely with its age and responsibility. The average Socialist recruit begins as a theoretical impossibilist and develops gradually into a constructive opportunist. Add a taste of real responsibility and he is hard to distinguish from a liberal reformer. It is the same with the movement. These Socialist successes in general, therefore, are a training school of constructive democracy.*

Now the party had five dailies, chief among them the *New York Call,* and Berger's *Milwaukee Leader.* It had

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* *Labor and Farmer Parties,* Nathan Fine, page 223.

262 English weeklies and 36 weeklies printed in foreign languages. There were ten Socialist English monthly publications.

The convention listened to the report of its secretary that 1,039 Socialists were holding public office, and then proceeded to discipline the revolutionaries within its ranks in no uncertain manner. The action taken by the majority of the 281 delegates at the 1912 convention, taken at the very peak of Socialist power in the United States, opened the way to the eventual split between extremists and moderates which all but destroyed the party within a decade.

The "Reds," as they frankly called themselves, and the "Yellows," as they frankly called their "comrade" opponents, collided over the tactics of the I. W. W., many of whose members were likewise members of the Socialist Party, and who, by this time, had repudiated political action. The fight centered around Section 6 of Article II of the constitutional amendment proposed by the moderates. Frankly aimed at Haywood and his revolutionary followers this section read originally:

> Any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates crime against the person or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation shall be expelled from membership in the party. Political action shall be construed to mean participation in elections for public office and practical legislative and administrative work along the lines of the Socialist party platform.

An amendment was introduced to substitute the word "sabotage" for the words "against the person," and the fight was on. Haywood, at Cooper Union, in February, 1912, had said: "I again want to justify direct action and sabotage. . . . I don't know of anything that can be ap-

plied that will bring as much satisfaction to you, and as much anguish to the boss as a little sabotage in the right place at the proper time."

Over this question of sabotage (i. e. striking on the job, drawing pay and checking production) debate raged so fiercely that at one time Berger shouted: "You will have a split yet, and, by God!, I am ready to split now! I am going back to Milwaukee and tell them to cut out the cancer of anarchy from their body. There is a difference between revolution and organized murder. We, in Milwaukee, believe in revolutionary political action, but we are opposed to the bomb and the dagger. You know where sabotage leads to. It led to the Haymarket riots and to the recent brigandage in London and Paris. Those who sing 'I'm a Bum' should get out and form a bum party of their own. I can see anarchism under the cloak of the I. W. W. and it is trying to fasten itself on the Socialist Party."

Finally, Hillquit, announcing that his constitutional committee had accepted the sabotage amendment, called for a vote, saying "It is time we line up." The total vote was 191 for the insertion of the word "sabotage" and the acceptance of the amendment, with 90 against. The "Reds" were definitely beaten. But they were bitter. In the *International Socialist Review* which they controlled, Gustavus Meyers wrote, foreshadowing the factional split which was to come during the war years:

> The dying and dispossessed little business element and the professional cult needing a political agency through which to express their material interests, have begun to get control of the machinery of the Socialist Party. In this they are aided by trades-union conservatives, who, winking at violence in their own ranks, were ready to declaim against an assumed violence on the part of modern working class organizations. The Social-

ist Party, built up so painfully upon the promise of its being a working class organization is in the greatest danger of being dominated by class groups whose aim—whether conscious or not—is a revolution, by force if necessary, which will overthrow the oligarchy of wealth but which will substitute a political state with a cult still riding the back of the working class. They fear a revolutionary movement from below, and seek to thwart it, even threatening, as they did in open convention, to disrupt the party in order to accomplish their ends. The encouraging factor, however, was the vigor, virility and remarkable strength displayed by the large number of "Reds" present at the convention. The future of the working class movement depends upon the growth of this hopeful element.

A year later, the moderates consolidated their victory by recalling Haywood from the National Executive Committee of the party for advocating sabotage.

4

Gene kept well away from a convention where he knew internal strife was inevitable. But he lost no time in declaring himself on sabotage. He was dead against it. "I am opposed to all forms of violence and that is why I am opposed to capitalism," he had written the year before. And now he wrote: "I am opposed to sabotage and to 'direct action.' I have not a bit of use for the 'propaganda of the deed.' These are the tactics of anarchist individuals and not of Socialist collectivists. My chief objection to all these measures is that they do violence to the class psychology of the workers, and cannot be successfully inculcated as mass doctrine. To the extent that the working class has power based upon class consciousness, force is unnecessary; to the extent that power is lacking, force can only result in harm."

The Left Wingers could never reconcile this aversion to the use of force with the flaming words of "Arouse Ye Slaves." Gene's friends replied that an article written in emotional heat did not necessarily represent a life philosophy; that while Gene had at times been sympathetic with the revolutionists, he was never prepared to throw away working-class political action until it had been given a fair trial; and finally, that his concern for the rank and file was too keen to permit him to subscribe to any such destructive, guerilla tactics as "sabotage" implied.

"Reds" and moderates, alike as it turned out, could agree on one thing—the naming of Debs for the fourth time as Presidential candidate for the Socialist Party. Dan Hogan, who knew his Ingersoll, nominated Gene who received 165 votes, while Seidel got 56 and Charles Edward Russell, of New York, received 54. Seidel beat Hogan for the Vice Presidential nomination and then the delegates went out and paraded around the streets of Indianapolis—"and the Red flag was right there," said a "Red" correspondent, "despite the fears of some timid souls that it might be 'unwise' to make it conspicuous."

Before the campaign was fairly under way, there began one of those spiteful brawls to which it would seem all reform movements are at times addicted. It centered around the personal habits of an ousted party official who was again put forward by a group of insiders. His ways with women had given offense to a number of those high in the party. One of the most effective weapons used against Socialists was the assertion that Socialism and "free love" were synonymous. And, in truth, here and there throughout the party, sentimental youngsters were attempting to mix economic and sexual "emancipation." There were also older

and more sophisticated members who used their Socialism as a cloak for amatory advances. And now much of this dirty linen was taken out and washed in public to the huge joy of all the unwashed. Enmities, supposedly long since decently interred, were brought to life. Buckets of ink were spilled in the party papers by the opposing forces before common sense stepped in to put an end to the affair.

Gene agonized over this scandal. He never could seem to get it through his head that a man could be a Socialist and at the same time retain traits of meanness, envy and self-seeking. Once converted to "The Cause," Gene took it for granted that the convert was purged of pettiness, and won over to the "comradely life." Nothing hurt him more than the spectacle of Socialists at one another's throats. Whenever he was called on, as he frequently was, to act as arbiter in the domestic affairs of party members, he fled in horror.

"I do not put my nose in other people's domestic affairs," he wrote to a Socialist who never forgave Gene for this, "and I have no stomach for domestic scandals. I have all I can do to attend to my own personal and domestic affairs, and I have made it a life-long rule to let other people attend to theirs."

Again, he said, "Many a fine spirit who would have served the movement as an effective agitator and powerful advocate, stung to the quick by the keen lash in the hand of a 'comrade,' has dropped into silence and faded into obscurity."

There was an occasion when he did step into a situation involving scandal. And he did it in no uncertain manner. The police of Terre Haute in July, 1913, arrested a girl in the red-light district, for soliciting. They gave her the

choice of going into a disorderly house or serving a term in the county jail. She chose the latter. Gene heard of her plight. She had eloped, was divorced within a short time, and her child was taken from her. Her family and friends had cast her out. She was desperate when she arrived in Terre Haute.

Gene went down to the jail and made arrangements to take the girl into his home as a member of the family. A local paper printed the story and it went all across the country. The sob sisters revelled in it. The Hearst papers ran a symposium "What Do You Think About E. V. Debs's Action?"

Gene said what he thought about the matter:—"We believe, my wife and I, that we are not only our brother's keeper, but our sister's keeper as well. There is only one thing remarkable about opening our home to an unfortunate young woman, and that is that any one should think it remarkable."

The girl lived with Gene and Kate for some months, finally to be taken back by her family.

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Gene was happy to turn his back upon a squabbling officialdom and go out to the healing presence of the rank and file.

This was no one-man campaign of the Red Special days. Behind Gene functioned a first-rate political machine. The Socialists employed up-to-date propaganda methods in 1912. They had trained workers in every important state, and substantial funds in the war chest. The pioneering work seemed done. The country had seen Socialists in

power and found them, on the whole, earnest, devoted, sometimes surprisingly practical public servants who talked tax assessments rather than anarchy and who were more interested in budgets than bombs.

Roosevelt's Armageddon stand had brought him many "border-line" Socialists, well acquainted with the ideology and traditions of the party of Debs. These played an important rôle in the writing of the Progressive platform which committed its advocates "to a drastic reorganization of the American political and economic system, to a substitution of a frank social policy for the individualism of the past, and to the realization of this policy, if necessary, by the use of efficient governmental instruments." *

While carefully avoiding Socialist phraseology, the Progressives, nevertheless, appropriated cheerfully enough a host of Socialist planks. A widely reprinted cartoon showing Debs and Roosevelt struggling for the possession of a maiden labelled "Socialism" indicated the recognition on the part of Roosevelt's foes of the fundamentally Socialist flavor of the Progressive doctrines.

Against the "social righteousness" of Roosevelt's Progressivism, Woodrow Wilson posed "the new freedom," which, according to Walter Lippman (who could not be accused of an unsympathetic attitude towards its originator), was "laid in the main upon sympathy with 'those on the make,' with the man looking for a career; upon horror at the crimes of monopoly, and little recognition of the crimes of competition. It (the new freedom) is, I believe, a vigorous restatement of the traditional American Utopia in which justice is to be attained by the balance of

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* *Progressive Democracy,* Herbert Croly, page 14.

self-interest. There is a kind of hope that an equality of push will neutralize all dangers, and produce an automatic co-operation. So Wilson seems to see the workingman merely as a possible shopkeeper. The assumptions are those of a generous commercialism." *

Above the prostrate form of William Howard Taft, Roosevelt, Wilson and Debs battled in that campaign, three colorful personalities, all of them making their various assaults upon the dominant commercial interests of the time. Gene, sensing the dangers in the Progressive movement which was cutting into Socialist strength in many quarters, concentrated his fire upon Roosevelt. Gene had not forgotten Roosevelt's "undesirable citizens" fling, and he did not let his hearers forget. He ridiculed T. R.'s "overnight conversion" to Progressivism, and prophesied with accuracy the Colonel's betrayal of his naïve idolators which was so soon to follow the campaign.

Roosevelt succeeded in the end more in splitting the Republican vote than in winning over any great cross sections of the wayfaring voters. He made possible the election of Wilson while he made impossible the formation of any liberal third party coalition for fourteen years to come.

Nine hundred thousand voters saw in Debs and his platform a more literal interpretation of their hopes and aspirations than either "the new freedom" or "social righteousness" appeared to offer. Within twelve years the Socialist Party had become a factor in the political life of America, a minor factor, perhaps, yet not to be ignored. From its one Congressman to its many councilmen, Socialism in office was developing a new American technique of

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* *Drift and Mastery,* Walter Lippman, page 314.

government. It was a technique devised to meet the demands of workers in fields, factories and shops. For the first time since the days of the Populists, the wayfaring man was having an active part in the management of governmental affairs. The branch of the Socialists at Schenectady, for example, had as many as a thousand men and women, the vast majority of them wage-earners, at meetings where such matters as city-paving, schooling, assessments were up for discussion. Steinmetz—genius that he was—was in constant conference with his "comrades" of the building trades, the workers in the locomotive shops, the machinists at the General Electric on their idea of a fitting educational system for the city. In Milwaukee, Berger's Socialists carried on a house-to-house campaign of leaflet distribution that did not let the people of that city forget that they had a Socialist in Congress and another Socialist at city hall. Berger came back from Congress at frequent intervals to report to his constituents and he made full use of his franking privilege by mailing, broadcast, reprints of his every speech in the House.

The Socialist Party of America, however, was not a nationalist organization, functioning independently of Socialists overseas. It sent its delegates to the congresses of the Second International (the successor to Marx's Internationale of 1864), where Socialists the world over sat down together. Jaures, the leonine Frenchman, Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie, Rosa Luxemburg and Georg Ledebour, Hjalmar Branting and a short, square-rigged Russian in a wrinkled sack suit who was one day to be known as Lenin—these met with the American delegates to formulate anti-war policies, to further the revolutionary movement in Russia, to plan in general the world

drive against capitalism. At these congresses from 1904 on, Morris Hillquit was the chief spokesman for America. The delegates listened to Keir Hardie's proposals to the 1910 congress of the International for a general strike in case of war, little realizing how soon they would be brought face to face with that question which then seemed so largely academic.

Four years later, the pistol shot at Sarajevo marked finis not only to the old order of things European, but to a chapter in the history of Socialism in America, and in the life of Gene Debs.

CHAPTER XIV

"I ABHOR WAR"

J. A. WAYLAND of the *Appeal* killed himself in 1912. He left behind these despairing words: "The struggle under the capitalist system isn't worth the effort. Let it pass." For a while the *Appeal* maintained its policies and prestige, but the directing genius of Wayland was sorely missed, and eventually the paper, in the hands of two of its staff writers, came out for the war. Soon after that, it went out of business.

Gene's writing for the *Appeal*, for the *Rip-Saw*, a free-lance Socialist paper of large circulation, and for miscellaneous radical publications, together with his lecture fees, assured him a comfortable income. For the first time in his life there was no serious financial problem to be faced. He could look forward to respite from the strain of speaking trips, certain that his pen would always give him and Kate enough for their needs. Editors, radical and conservative alike, were asking for contributions from the accepted spokesman of Socialism in this country. Usually they printed what he sent them. If they changed anything in Gene's manuscript without first consulting its author, they were made unhappy. One Terre Haute paper refused a contribution of Gene's on a hotly controversial subject. Gene let it be known that he was prepared to print 50,000 copies of the article at his own expense and send them through the mails to the voters of Vigo County with the

reasons for the rejection appended. The article appeared in the paper as Gene had written it.

2

No sooner had the Germans started through Belgium in the summer of 1914, than throughout the East there rose the cries of the "preparedness" advocates. These sounded discordantly in the ears of the dwellers in "The Valley of Democracy"; but for the most part the mid-West figured that Eastern Anglophiles were back of the alarms, and the jingoes made small impression.

There was no such indifference in the man from Terre Haute. He had read the July, 1914, protests of the Socialists of Berlin— "Let the ears of the tyrants everywhere hear our shout 'We will have no war.' International fraternization forever!"; of the French Socialists—"Of all means to prevent war and bring governments to arbitration, we hold that of the general strike in all countries concerned to be most effectual"; of Vienna—"In the name of all those who labor and toil, we throw the responsibility on those who have taken the step which is leading us into the terrible abyss." He had read Jaures's speech of white flame to the Socialists in Brussels, ending: "I thank our German comrades in the name of the French and I swear: We will continue to support them like brothers against the war-mongers' Attila campaign, true till death."

Then he had read of the swift collapse of the German Socialists ("If, in a few days, the German people should be called to arms, the Social Democrats, too, will defend their fatherland"); the hopeless fighting of MacDonald and Keir Hardie for peace; and finally, the assassination of

Jaures. There was to be then, no general strike, no mass movement against the bloody thing. Now the Socialists in uniform on both sides were butchering their comrades. It was a nightmare for Gene from which there was to be no awakening. But he saw where his duty lay.

He sniffed out from afar the menace in the "preparedness" propaganda to all that he held dear. He wrote in the *Appeal:*

> When Sims, the negro fugitive, was captured in Massachusetts and returned to slavery by the authorities of the commonwealth, Wendell Phillips in an impassioned speech of protest, pointing out the inscription above the portals of the State House which read: "God Bless our Commonwealth," exclaimed bitterly: "If the State of Massachusetts has become the bloodhound of the Southern slave owners, then I say: 'God damn our Commonwealth!'"
>
> That precisely expresses my view of plutocratic "preparedness." It is nothing less than a monstrous conspiracy, a colossal crime of the ruling nabobs and their gilded gangsters against the common people, and once they have the great standing army and the powerful navy they are plotting for, the once vaunted American republic will be transmogrified into a military oligarchy and the working class may then bid farewell to the few surviving liberties which have not yet been strangled by the courts or crushed by the militia of the capitalist class.

He followed this up immediately with a speaking trip through the Texas panhandle and Oklahoma, pleading for the people to keep their heads and reject the "greedy dogs which can never have enough," as he called the militarists. Theodore went along.

It was a trip made in the heat of a blistering September with Gene speaking in the open to thousands of farmers, coal miners and railroaders gathered for the huge encampments which made that section of the country one of the

strongholds of Socialism. At the largest of these encampments, held in a grove miles from the nearest town, the committeemen told Theodore that "the boys wanted to put on a sort of a parade for Gene." "But where's the parade going?" asked Theodore, gazing out across a country whose flatness was relieved only by the clump of trees under which they stood. "Oh, just around a bit," was the answer. And then at a signal, the farmers put their children and women-folk into their wagons and the parade began, the men walking at the heads of their teams. Gene and Theodore afoot in the vanguard, looked back on a long column of men and horses and wagons, swinging through a cloud of dust that rose up against a red sun. Some one began singing the *Internationale:*

> Arise ye prisoners of starvation! Arise ye wretched of the Earth! . . .

There were no drums for the marching of these people, no flags to wave them on, no cheering crowds along the way. They went for an hour, through a desert country, wheeled round and marched back to the grove again to hear Gene speak.

That night the heat had made him deathly ill, but over and again Gene said to Theodore, who fluttered around him: "By God, these are the real people. They want no war and we must keep them forever out of this thing."

When Gene spoke in the coldest halls in the dead of winter, the perspiration ran from him. Now he seemed in danger of melting away. After the meeting in his room in a poverty-stricken hotel, Gene sat on a bed with sagging springs and a brick-hard mattress while Theodore rubbed him down as a second rubs down a panting fighter. Neither

of the brothers could sleep through those dreadful nights of clutching heat and Gene's stomach went back on him.

Wherever he turned, there were delegations and committees from the rank and file pressing in on him, hanging on his every word, wistfully trying to touch his hand. They stood in the hall outside his room, and any time Theodore opened the door, one or two would try to slip past for a word from the ashen-faced man stretched out on the bed gasping for air. They went with Gene from the hotel to the station and boarded his train, crowding around him until Theodore and the train crew drove them off.

At the end of ten days of this, the brothers went back to Terre Haute where Gene took to his bed. Katherine's care brought him through, but the effects of these new exertions, bringing on a recurrence of the old headaches that followed his sunstroke in West Virginia, hit Gene hard.

When he came to New York in 1915, his friends were disturbed at his appearance. For the first time they realized that Gene, whom they had regarded as ageless, was growing old. They had scheduled him to speak at a series of meetings in all the boroughs. They put him up at the Chelsea Hotel in West Twenty-third Street, with the dependable Mouritz De Young on guard to see to it that Gene's privacy was not invaded. De Young took his responsibilities very much to heart. One morning he found that his charge had gone. He was vastly alarmed. He set out posthaste to track down Gene.

As he hurried through Madison Square, De Young noticed a crowd of ragged men gather around a looming figure. He shouldered his way toward Gene who beamed amiably, and called "Doctor," (no one knows why he called De Young "Doctor" but he had a way of pinning

professional titles on his friends, "Colonel" for a decidedly unmartial teacher, "Professor" for an Indiana coal miner), "Doctor, have you any money with you?" De Young fished up five one dollar bills. "Give it to these poor devils," Gene commanded, "they're hungry." Gene had emptied his pockets long since.

They went to the offices of the *Masses*, where Max Eastman, Art Young, Floyd Dell, Charles W. Wood and other brilliant writers and artists were planting radical darts under conservative hides. "How that man fills a room!" exclaimed Max, watching the youngsters swarm around Gene. They dropped in at the offices of the *Call* on Pearl Street, and there was a great deal of embracing at the Rand School.

Along the Eastern seaboard the repercussions of the artillery firing in France were felt but faintly as yet. They had not rolled beyond the Alleghenies.

In August, 1915, Gene could write in the *Appeal* and have his words carried to 300,000 readers by government employees:

> Working men and working women of America! Let us swear by all that is dear to us and all that is sacred to our cause, never to become a soldier and never to go to war.

But there were few among the workers who would listen, even to Gene. Wages were skyrocketing. A world overseas, turning to the dealing of death, called on the American workers to keep armies and civilians supplied with the essentials of life. Socialism might be something good to think about after the war, but here and now was the chance to make money, fast. So though Berger growled against war in the *Leader*, and Gene flamed furiously in

the *Appeal*, and John Spargo and Allan L. Benson and George R. Kirkpatrick stood by the slogan in the Congressional campaigns of 1914, "every Socialist ballot is a protest against war," the workers as a whole paid slight heed to the Socialist warnings against "preparedness."

Among the American Socialists were many who forsook their internationalism in those critical days. Charles Edward Russell, who had made a good showing in his gubernatorial campaign in New York in 1912, was franker than most. He said in a speech which he knew might cost him the loss of the bulk of his followers: "We in America either must destroy what little armament we have and declare that under no circumstances will we fight and invite Germany and Japan to help themselves to what is ours, or we have to build an army and navy better than the best. I am a supporter of the United States and would not see it conquered, because it is the leader in democracy."

The anti-preparedness group were enraged at this. Spargo shouted: "The hypocritical mask of 'preparedness' hides the ugly features of militarism. Let us unmask and destroy the beast!" The Socialists took a referendum on this constitutional amendment: "Any member of the Socialist Party, elected to an office, who shall in any way vote to appropriate moneys for military or naval purposes, or war, shall be expelled from the party." It was carried by 11,041 votes to 782.

The Presidential campaign of 1916 fully revealed the straits into which the war had led the American Socialists. Gene refused flatly to allow his name to be placed in nomination. There was no mistaking the fact that even his amazing physical prowess could not stand the strain of another

campaign. He was sixty-one years old, and seemed nearer seventy. The crowded years of agitation were taking their toll. Besides he felt that the time was long overdue for a new personality at the head of the ticket. This time the party heeded him and, instead of holding a convention, sent out referendum ballots for the nominations—a method long advocated by Western Socialists who could ill afford to pay the expenses of their delegates. Allan Benson, mainly because his name was known to readers of his articles in the *Appeal* and his anti-war pamphlets, received the nomination, with George Kirkpatrick as his running mate.

Benson was a better writer than speaker. His campaign was colorless. The crowds missed the Debsian ardors. Workers and farmers, instinctively pacifistic, voted for Wilson on the strength of the slogan, "He kept us out of war." The election as they saw it, was a nation-wide referendum on the subject of war or peace, wherein the Socialists played a small part. Benson polled only 585,113 votes, one-third less than Gene's vote of 1912. Wilson stayed in the White House as the personification of the hopes of those who wanted no direct part in the European catastrophe.

Gene ran for Congress that year in his home district, the Fifth Indiana. He made several speeches denunciatory of the war mongers and marched, with Katherine at his side, at the head of a great parade of workers through the streets of Terre Haute on election eve. The vote was a disappointment. Gene defeated his Democratic opponent, but Everett Sanders, the Republican, who later was to become Harding's secretary, was an easy winner.

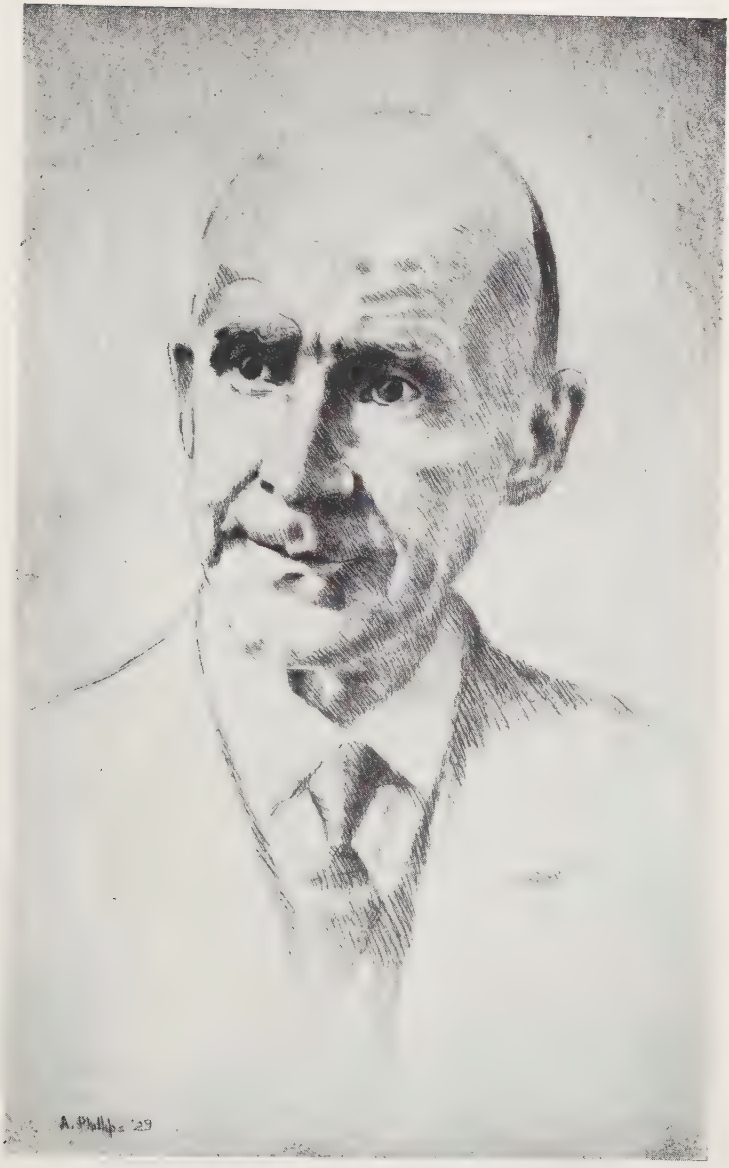
3

"What was running through Wilson's mind in those harrowing times when he was engrossed in 'waging neutrality?' How did he view the conflict that was shaking the world?" asks Charles A. Beard in *The Rise of American Civilization*. He finds the answer to the amazing two-months' shift on Wilson's part from that of a cold neutral to a hot participant in much the same factors which the anti-war Socialists maintained had operated to cause this country's entrance into the war. Officially, of course, America went in because of Germany's resumption of submarine warfare after her pledges of a truce in this business, made in the tense days following the sinking of the Lusitania. Off the record, however, America's leading latter-day historian is on all fours with the Socialists of 1917 when he says:

> At best, American investors who had staked money on the Anglo-French side, munition makers who had accepted the paper of London and Paris in return for supplies, merchants and manufacturers who had huge Entente credits on their books were placed in a serious dilemma; they were in danger of immense losses unless the United States government came to their rescue.*

Professor Beard mentions as well, "professional profiteers and propagandists" and the "large body of Americans of English stock who felt bound to England by ties of blood and affection and who urged upon Wilson a war in the name of kinship." Then there were those who feared

* *The Rise of American Civilization,* page 630–631.



(Etching by A. Phillips)

THE "OLD AGITATOR"

the triumph of the "German military caste in the Old World."

In their own language, the Socialists who met at St. Louis in April, 1917, a few days after the declaration of war on Germany, said then what most competent students of the reasons for our entering the war are saying today.

The momentous "St. Louis Declaration" of the party said:

> Our entrance into the European war was instigated by the predatory capitalists in the United States who boast of the enormous profits of seven billion dollars from the manufacture and sale of munitions and war supplies and from the exportation of American foodstuffs and other necessaries. They are also deeply interested in the continuance of war and the success of the allied arms through our huge loans to the governments of the Allied Powers and through other commercial ties. It is the same interests which strive for imperialistic domination of the Western Hemisphere. . . .
>
> The working class of the United States has no quarrel with the working class of Germany or of any other country. The people of the United States have no quarrel with the people of Germany or any other country. The American people did not want and do not want this war. They have not been consulted about the war and have had no part in declaring war. They have been plunged into this war by the trickery and treachery of the ruling class of the country through its representatives in the National Administration and National Congress, its demagogic agitators, its subsidized press and other servile instruments of public expression. . . .

The party pledged itself to the following course of action for the duration of the war:

1. Continuous, active and public opposition to the war, through demonstrations, mass petitions and all other means within our power.

2. Unyielding opposition to all proposed legislation for military or industrial conscription. Should such conscription be forced upon the people, we pledge ourselves to continuous efforts for the repeal of such laws and to the support of all mass movements in opposition to conscription. We pledge ourselves to oppose with all our strength any attempt to raise money for payment of war expense by taxing the necessaries of life or issuing bonds which will put the burden upon future generations. We demand that the capitalist class, which is responsible for the war, pay its cost. Let those who kindled the fire, furnish the fuel.
3. Vigorous resistance to all reactionary measures, such as censorship of press and mails, restriction of the rights of free speech, assemblage, and organization, or compulsory arbitration and limitation of the right to strike.
4. Consistent propaganda against military training and militaristic teaching in the public schools.
5. Extension of the campaign of education among the workers to organize them into strong, class-conscious, and closely unified political and industrial organizations, to enable them by concerted and harmonious mass action to shorten this war to establish lasting peace.
6. Widespread educational propaganda to enlighten the masses as to the true relation between capitalism and war, and to rouse and organize them for action, not only against present war evils, but for the prevention of future wars and for the destruction of the causes of war.
7. To protect the masses of the American people from the pressing danger of starvation which the war in Europe has brought upon them, and which the entry of the United States has already accentuated, we demand—
   (a) The restriction of food exports so long as the present shortage continues, the fixing of maximum prices and whatever measures may be necessary to prevent the food speculators from holding back the supplies now in their hands;
   (b) The socialization and democratic management of the great industries concerned with the production, transportation, storage, and the marketing of food and other necessaries of life;
   (c) The socialization and democratic management of all

land and other natural resources now held out of use for monopolistic or speculative profit.

These measures are presented as means of protecting the workers against the evil results of the present war. The danger of recurrence of war will exist as long as the capitalist system of industry remains in existence. The end of wars will come with the establishment of socialized industry and industrial democracy the world over. The Socialist Party calls upon all the workers to join in its struggle to reach this goal, and thus bring into the world a new society in which peace, fraternity, and human brotherhood will be the dominant ideals.

The "St. Louis Declaration" was sent to the members for referendum, and the rank and file adopted it by an overwhelmingly large vote. James Oneal, the leading historian of Socialism in America, says: "Every section of the majority report but one received over 21,000 votes, while the 'Nay' votes, with one exception, averaged 350." The immediate result of the declaration was to send out of the party such pro-ally nationalists as A. M. Simons, John Spargo, Charles Edward Russell, William English Walling; trade-unionists who were accepting Samuel Gompers's super-patriotism; * a host of middle-class intellectuals

* Normally Gompers's patriotism was a very fine thing. He loved his country for the sufficient reason that it was his. But during the war, and to some degree after, his alien-Jew-agitator complex may have had something to do with his rather blatant one-hundred-percentism, as some who were close to him felt. Still, there was a good deal of shrewdness mixed with his nationalist frenzy. When the war broke out, he clearly foresaw the war-time legislation in favor of labor. He saw in the war "the disenthrallment of the American worker of every vestige of wrong and injustice." He felt that then and there was labor's supreme chance to accelerate its standard of living. And the trend of his mind appears very clearly in the rhetorical question he asked the American people early in 1918 in a public address, and in his own sanguine answer to it: "When the war is over, do you think that . . . Labor will be thrown aside? Not on your life! . . ." . . . *What Manner of Man was Gompers,* Benjamin Stolberg, the *Atlantic Monthly,* March, 1925.

whose Socialism had always been nearer a sentimental liberalism than any radicalism, and who saw in Wilson a genuine savior of democracy. Again, the "St. Louis Declaration" served notice that in America there was one group which would not go along, and this brought down upon the party membership, from its high officials to its humblest Jimmie Higginses, the full force of a nation hysterically committed to action. With the official enemy far distant and invisible, hordes of volunteer snoopers, uniformed and civilian Peeping Toms, spy chasers, labor baiters, professional Red haters, patriotic sadists, vented their pent-up spleen on the pitifully small number of men and women who dared to stand up and be counted against the war.

From pulpits and platforms and academic halls and from labor union lodges as well, there rose in shrill crescendo the song of hate against the radicals. The atrocity stories, the mass propaganda had turned a laughter-loving, tolerant, naïvely democratic people into a rancorous mob who fell with snarling fury on every non-conformist. In the Mid-West, furthest removed from the war's physical presence, the emotional frenzy was most marked. Once the wayfaring man had recovered from his bewilderment at being committed to a war from which a few months before he had been officially informed it was his duty to abstain, he sought release from intellectual perplexment in intransigeant conformity.

In writing of those days, Harold Stearns in his *Liberalism in America* says:—

> . . . We watched the pulpit degenerate from a Christian instrument into a mere time-server of the State. We watched ministers of the gospel become mere vulgar ranters and abusers. We watched the universities expel members of their faculties who

showed any originality or hardihood. We watched our schools turn into propaganda centres, perverting history and corrupting the minds of our next generation with all kinds of lies and false incitements. We watched the Espionage Act used as an instrument by cynical powerful interests for the disposal of social agitators. Under the same act we watched innocent men and women sent to jail for expressing mild opposition to the policies of the government. We watched our judges and courts talk in the language of abusive fishwives. We watched the extension of the spy system into a terrorism which did not balk at opening private letters. We watched the almost complete denial of the right of free speech and assemblage. We watched our newspapers act as open inciters to riot. We watched mob violence condoned by our leading citizens. We watched young children on the street corners during Liberty Loan campaigns retailing atrocity stories which they themselves only half understood. We watched our stage and our moving pictures forget every artistic standard in their eagerness to exploit patriotism. We watched the denial of political asylum, one of our oldest traditions. We watched the seizure of enemy property in direct violation of one of our treaties. We watched the disappearance of anything like sportsmanship or fair play in our treatment of the actual enemy and of those of his blood in this country. We watched the military machine develop a reckless ruthlessness which would have been a credit to Prussia itself.

As though to make atonement to the rest of America for having harbored and honored the country's chief dissenter, Terre Haute indulged in a feverish ecstasy of patriotism. Bands of business men under police protection raided homes of those suspected of being on friendly terms with Gene. A next-door neighbor of Theodore's, a grocer of German descent, who had offended in some obscure manner the patriotic sensibilities of Terre Haute, was beaten up by a banker while a willing policeman held the grocer's arms. In a mining camp outside of town, a Socialist coal digger who had refused to subscribe to a Liberty Bond came near to being lynched. A feeble-minded farmer to

the south of Terre Haute was strung up to the rafters of his barn. But no one laid hands on Gene or Theodore. Every day these two walked together through the streets of their suddenly hostile town where women clutched their children at the sight of Gene, and neighbors and friends of many years went ostentatiously to the other side of the street at the approach of the brothers.

The victims of persecutions came stealthily and by night to tell Gene of the tortures and indignities to which they were subject. His office became a clearing house for the anguish of the inarticulate, caught somehow in a maze of hate, seeking solace and sympathy from the one man whom they could trust in these times of fear. Gene would walk the streets late at night after hearing these pitiful stories beating his hands together over the thought of a world gone mad.

But there was nothing he could do. When a German worker whose people had fled to this country to escape Kaiserism and its works told Gene how his home had been invaded and his business destroyed, Gene burst out; "Tell those cowards to keep well away from the home of Eugene Victor Debs. By God!" exclaimed the lover of peace, who in all his life had never struck a blow or been struck, "if any of them so much as puts a foot on my property, I will shoot him dead." The literal-minded German forthwith proceeded to give Gene's exact words to the draft board. Its members listened in silence. They knew that Gene would keep his word. And the man-hunting crowds kept well away from North Eighth Street.

In that year 1917, the darkest of his life, Gene sickened physically and spiritually. He was forced to drink all the bitter dregs of the war's poisoned cups. Everywhere com-

rades, beloved of him, were being hounded, tortured in military camps where they refused to don uniforms, persecuted in courts and jails, driven from homes in which they were born and where they had lived honorable lives, made outcasts by a society which but a few years before had seemed ready to accept "the comradely life."

Through the chorus of hate in the latter part of November, 1917, there sounded suddenly a clear revolutionary summons which Gene's ear was quick to catch. In Russia, the Bolsheviks made their revolution. And in Terre Haute a tortured man hailed their triumph.

To Gene, as to thousands of other Socialists, the Bolshevik turnover marked the first signs of the revulsion of the proletariat against a capitalist war, and symbolized as well a world-wide leftward swing which would have its effect in every warring nation. The Russian revolution of November 7th was, in many respects, more far-reaching in its effects upon the Socialist Party than had been America's entrance into the war. Eventually, it was to break the party into two and create a bitterness among former comrades and fellow-fighters in the ranks of Socialism. The aftermath still lingers thirteen years later. But when word first reached the Socialists in this country that the Bolshevists were in power, that stirring fact for a little while swept away all factional difficulties.

With Gene, the rank and file thrilled at the bugle notes ringing over Russian snows. They had a vision of an ending to all this warfare very different indeed from the pictures in the minds of the war leaders among the Allies. The central figures in that vision were a factory worker and peasant thrusting bayonets aside and reaching for hammers and sickles.

4

The turn of events in Russia changed the attitude of many Socialists towards the war. In New York, the revolutionaries, who would have no part in the war up to now, opened a recruiting office to raise a volunteer army to defend the workers' republic against the Germans.

Gene felt that in light of the Russian situation there should be a re-statement of the aims of the Socialist Party.* He wrote in the *Appeal* in the early part of 1918, suggesting that a convention be called to revise "the St. Louis Declaration."

At once the rumor was circulated inside and outside the party, that "the old man was slipping," that the pressure of the propagandists, the savage assaults of his fellows, had forced Gene to retreat. The times were made to order for the rumor-mongers. Gene had no platform now outside of New York City, where, alone, Socialist meetings were being held, and these under the heaviest surveillance. (Hillquit's brilliant mayoralty campaign in the autumn of 1917 had revealed such strong anti-war sentiment on the part of the New York workers that the authorities had no desire to press the Socialists too hard.) But everywhere else, Socialist headquarters were raided, the officials arrested, meetings forbidden, Socialist papers barred from the mails. In March, Gene wrote in the *Terre Haute Tribune* on the fresh invasion of Russia by the Germans:

> The shame of this invasion is not so much that of the Kaiser and the junkers as it is the majority Socialists of Germany. In standing for this crime, they cap the climax of their betrayal and

* *Debs, Authorized Life,* Karsner, page 19.

> disgrace of the Socialist movement. In standing for this, the majority Socialists of Germany prove finally that they will stand for anything except Socialism and democracy.

Capitalist newspapers seized on this as Gene's repudiation of German socialism and his acceptance of the cause of the allies. They reiterated their statements that Debs was "at last coming to see the light." When it finally dawned on Gene just what was being said about him, he made this statement in May, 1918:

> I have urged a special convention to re-state the attitude of the Party towards the war in the light of the present situation. The St. Louis platform of a year ago was all right at the time of its adoption. Certain parts of it might have been worded differently, but as a whole it declared the attitude of the Party in fearless terms and I give it my wholehearted approval. There is nothing in that platform to apologize for or retract. It fits the time and the occasion but much has happened since then and a restatement more complete and comprehensive is now necessary in my opinion. . . .

It is true that by this time a considerable number of influential Socialists were in favor of a less implacable attitude towards the war. In June, Victor Berger wrote in the *Milwaukee Leader*, even as Government officials were harassing the staff members of his paper, and preparing to curtail its mailing privileges:

> Personally, I was against the war before the war was declared, as was every true Socialist. The Socialist Party did all it could to keep this country out of the war. But now, since we are in the war, I want to win this war—for democracy. And only for democracy. . . . Let us hope we will win the war quickly.

Gene had no such hopes of any triumphant democracy arising from the flames of war. When James Oneal came to

Terre Haute in the first days of June, Gene told him that there were certain things which he (Gene) must say about the war. There was to be a State Convention of the Ohio Socialists in Canton and he was going to say them there. Oneal writes of that conversation:

> It was his intention deliberately to violate the Espionage Act and take the consequences. Nothing could have persuaded him from his purpose. He was filled with resentment over the hypocritical and terrorist policies of Woodrow Wilson. Debs believed that he had no business being outside of jail while others were inside for saying what he believed.

All doubts and questionings as to Gene's attitude towards the war were swept away five minutes after he stepped onto the platform at the Canton convention on June 16, 1918.

On his way to the Canton meeting, he had stopped off at the Stark County Workhouse to visit three Cleveland Socialists, Charles E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker, sentenced to serve one year each for their anti-war stand in 1917.

He began his speech in a tense atmosphere. He noticed that in the rear of the hall a man was taking notes. He knew that many agents of the Department of Justice were in the audience. He said that he had just returned from a visit to the workhouse,

> where three of our most loyal comrades are paying the penalty for their devotion to the cause of the working class. They have come to realize, as many of us have, that it is extremely dangerous to exercise the Constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe for the world. I realize in speaking to you this afternoon, that there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I must be extremely careful, prudent, as to what I say, and even more

careful and prudent as to how I say it. I may not be able to say all I think, but I am not going to say anything I do not think. And I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than a sycophant or coward on the streets. They may put those boys in jail and some of the rest of us in jail, but they cannot put the Socialist movement in jail. Those prison bars separate their bodies from ours, but their souls are here this afternoon. They are simply paying the penalty that all men have paid in all of the ages of history for standing erect and seeking to pave the way for better conditions for mankind.

If it had not been for the men and women who, in the past, have had the moral courage to go to jail, we would still be in the jungles.

Why should a Socialist be discouraged on the eve of the greatest triumph of all history of the Socialist movement? It is true that these are anxious, trying days for us all, testing those who are upholding the banner of the working class in the greatest struggle the world has ever known against the exploiters of the world; a time in which the weak, the cowardly, will falter and fail and desert. They lack the fibre to endure the revolutionary test. They fall away. They disappear as if they had never been.

On the other hand, they who are animated with the unconquerable spirit of the social revolution, they who have the moral courage to stand erect, to assert their convictions, to stand by them, to go to jail or to hell for them—they are writing their names in this crucial hour, they are writing their names in fadeless letters in the history of mankind. Those boys over yonder, those comrades of ours—and how I love them—aye, they are our younger brothers, their names are seared in our souls. . . .

I am proud of them. They are there for us and we are here for them. Their lips, though temporarily mute, are more eloquent than ever before, and their voices, though silent, are heard around the world. . . .

He spoke of the imprisonment of Kate Richards O'Hare who, while on a speaking trip for the *Rip-Saw*, had been arrested in North Dakota and sentenced to the penitentiary for ten years for an anti-war speech; he spoke of a similar

sentence imposed on Rose Pastor Stokes, the factory girl who had married a millionaire; and asked: "What did she say? She said that a government could not serve both the profiteers and the employees of the profiteers. Roosevelt has said a thousand times more in his paper, the *Kansas City Star*. He would do everything possible to discredit Wilson's administration in order to give his party credit. The Republican and Democratic Parties are all patriots this year, and they are going to combine to prevent the election of any disloyal Socialist. Do you know of any difference between them? One is in, the other is out. That is all the difference. . . . The heart of the international Socialist never beats a retreat," he continued. "They are pressing forward here, there, everywhere, in all the zones that girdle this globe. These workers, these class-conscious workers, these children of honest toil are wiping out the boundary lines everywhere. They are proclaiming the glad tidings of the coming emancipation. Everywhere they are having their hearts attuned to the sacred cause; everywhere they are moving toward democracy, moving toward the sunrise, their faces aglow with the light of coming day. These are the men who must guide us in the greatest crisis the world has ever known. They are making history. They are bound upon the emancipation of the human race."

"Few men have the courage to say a decent word in favor of the I. W. W. I have. . . . The I. W. W. in its career has never committed as much violence against the ruling class as the ruling class has committed against the people. The trial at Chicago is now on and they have not proven violence in a single solitary case, and yet, one hundred and twelve have been on trial for months and months without a shade of evidence. And this is all in its favor.

And for this and many other reasons, the I. W. W. is fighting the fight of the bottom dog. For the very reason that Gompers is glorified by Wall Street, Bill Haywood is despised by Wall Street. What you need is greater organization."

Gene made his oft-repeated plea for industrial unionism, and ended: "And now for all of us to do our duty. The call is ringing in your ears. Do not worry over the charge of treason to your masters, but be concerned about the treason that involves yourself. This year we are going to sweep into power and in this nation we are going to destroy capitalistic institutions and recreate them. . . . The world of capital is collapsing. We need industrial builders. . . . We Socialists are the builders of the world that is to be. We are inviting you this afternoon. Join and it will help you. In due course of time we will proclaim the emancipation of the brotherhood of all mankind."

Gene had talked for about two hours. On the platform near him, Edward B. Sterling, a young lawyer of Canton, took down in shorthand, as official convention reporter, the entire speech. As soon as Gene was done, and the cheering had subsided, the man in the back of the hall who had been taking notes, slipped out. Agents of the Department of Justice went among the crowd as it left the hall, culling out the younger socialists and demanding to see their draft registry cards. There was no disorder. But the Socialists who came away from that meeting were convinced of two things, that Gene had made his anti-war stand plain, and that he would suffer the consequences.

DEBS WAKES UP
HOWLING AT WAR:
U. S. MAY GET HIM

was the headline in the *Chicago Tribune* in its report of the Canton speech. The *Terre Haute Tribune* carried a story that week, beginning: "Eugene V. Debs, Terre Haute's noted radical, is suspected by the United States government of being in a plan with the Trotsky group in Russia to spread Bolshevism in this country."

Four days after the speech, a Federal Grand Jury hastily impanelled at Cleveland returned an indictment consisting of ten counts against Debs under Section III of the Act of June 15, 1917, as amended by the act of May 16, 1918, and known as the Espionage Law. Gene was arrested on June 30th, while speaking at a Socialist meeting in the West Side Park in Cleveland. He was released on bail.

The press exulted. "Debs is doing more to aid the Hun Kaiser," said the *Cleveland Press* on June 19th, "than all the pro-German Germans in America. He is of greater assistance to the Boches in France than are the Turks, Bulgarians and the Austrians. His Canton speech, even now being spread broadcast through all Germany and all German trenches, will kill more American soldiers than all German submarines that hunt the American transport ships."

For the remainder of that summer, Gene was busy consulting with his chief counsel, Seymour Stedman, and with the assistants to Stedman, William A. Cunnea, of Chicago; Joseph W. Sharts, of Dayton, Ohio; and Morris Wolf, of Cleveland. His trial was set for September 9th in Cleveland before Judge D. C. Westenhaver who was known for his affiliations with Frederic C. Howe and other liberals in that city. The day before the trial, Gene went up from Terre Haute with Theodore, and into his room at the Gillsy House in Cleveland there came Socialist sympathiz-

ers from all parts of the country. Max Eastman and Rose Pastor Stokes were there, and David Karsner of the *New York Call*, and Scott Nearing who wrote later:

> . . . and on Sunday, September 8th, I had the opportunity of spending the afternoon with Debs and his attorney and of hearing him review the case. The case was discussed, the attorneys presenting the various possibilities. Debs made it quite clear that there was only one thing he could do and that was to repeat his Canton speech. He said, "I have nothing to take back. All I said I believe to be true. I have no reason to change my mind. I have no reasons to change my position." His lawyers and he knew on Sunday that the following week would see him sentenced to the penitentiary.
>
> He spoke of it in his quiet way as his simple opportunity to serve the cause. He said that he had always felt like a member of the rank and file, and now he had his chance to travel along the road the ordinary man had to follow under ordinary circumstances—to go right on along the road and ignore the difficulties that were ahead. He was an old man, broken in health, facing, without flinching, without budging an eyelid, a possibility of twenty years in jail.
>
> I remember leaving the hotel that afternoon and walking down to the station and saying to myself: "If that man can behave as he does, there is surely no excuse for us younger chaps," and I felt then as I have ever since, that I never in my life came in contact with so radiant a spirit as I did that afternoon when Debs was getting ready to take his place in the Federal Court and receive a penitentiary sentence.*

It was a jury of farmers that tried Gene, twelve men who, under the questioning of District Attorney E. S. Wertz and his assistant, F. B. Kavanaugh, said that they believed in the Constitution and disclaimed any prejudice against Gene or his party. Gene came into the courtroom with Seymour Stedman, watched with the closest interest the selection of the jury, and leaned across the counsel

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* *The Debs Decision,* Scott Nearing (a pamphlet) pages 14–15.

table looking into the face of Kavanaugh, who, in his opening address, said, pointing at Gene, "This man is the palpitating pulse of the sedition crusade. By his words shall he be judged, and by his words shall he be condemned."

Judge Westenhaver banged his gavel at the applause which rose in the courtroom when Stedman in his opening speech said: "You would not indict Woodrow Wilson because he wrote in his book *The New Freedom*, that wars are brought about by the rulers and not by the people." Mrs. Stokes, who had led the applause, and who was under bail awaiting the decision of the Supreme Court as to her case, was fined by the irate judge.

A reporter, Clyde R. Miller, and Virgil Steiner, a twenty-year old clerk employed by a motor-car concern at Canton, were the two chief witnesses against Gene. Steiner was the youth who had taken notes of Gene's speech, in the rear of the hall at Canton. It was on his version of the speech that the indictment was drawn. As it developed, there was a notable difference between the Steiner version and that of Sterling's, the official stenographer. Steiner, who said that he had been pressed into service by the Department of Justice agents, admitted that he had been unable to keep up with Gene's rapid-fire oratory, and that he had simply taken down the principal features of the address. During a recess after Steiner's testimony, the youth seemed on the verge of breaking down. Gene walked over to him and patted him on the shoulder. "Never mind, sonny," said Gene, "you did the best you could under the circumstances. It wasn't fair to ask you to take that all down." He said to the reporter who had testified that in an interview Gene had stood by his defense of the Bolsheviki "You quoted me straight and accurate. I don't want

you ever to feel that you have done me an injury by testifying against me. You had to do it and you did it like a gentleman."

The prosecution closed its case on the afternoon of September 11th, and that night Gene sat in his room, puffing at a long cigar and making notes on a pad propped up on his knee. He had decided to have done with legal bickerings. The following day, the defense, through Seymour Stedman, announced that it also rested its case, and Stedman said briefly: "Mr. Debs will plead his case before the jury."

Gene stood up straight beside the counsel table, threw back the lapels of his grey tweed coat, adjusted his spectacles, and glancing occasionally at the notes he had made the night before, delivered the speech which has become one of the most cherished documents in the archives of the American Socialists.

First, he quoted the charges made in the indictment against him, i. e.: attempting to cause insubordination, mutiny, disloyalty, and refusal of duty within the military forces of the United States, and the obstruction of recruiting, and the uttering of words "intended to procure and incite resistance to the United States, and to promote the cause of the Imperial German Government."

He said, turning to the farmers in the jury box:

> Gentlemen, you have heard the report of my speech at Canton on June 16, and I submit that there is not a word in that speech to warrant these charges. I admit having delivered the speech. I admit the accuracy of the speech in all of its main features as reported in this proceeding. There were two distinct reports. They vary somewhat, but they are agreed upon all the material statements embodied in that speech.
>
> In what I had to say there my purpose was to educate the

people to understand something about the social system in which we live and to prepare them to change this system by perfectly peaceable and orderly means into what I, as a Socialist, conceive to be a real democracy.

From what you heard in the address of counsel for the prosecution, you might naturally infer that I am an advocate of force and violence. It is not true. I have never advocated violence in any form. I always believed in education, in intelligence, in enlightenment, and I have always made my appeal to the reason and to the conscience of the people.

I admit being opposed to the present form of government. I admit being opposed to the present social system. I am doing what little I can, and have been for many years, to bring about a change that shall do away with the rule of the great body of the people by a relatively small class and establish in this country an industrial and social democracy.

Again he repeated his defense of Kate Richards O'Hare, Rose Pastor Stokes, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht and Baker. Again he expressed his sympathy for the Bolsheviks. He spoke of the American revolutionaries, Washington, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry. He said:

The minority are right. In every age there have been a few heroic souls who have been in advance of their time, who have been misunderstood, maligned, persecuted, sometimes put to death. Long after their martyrdom monuments were erected to them and garlands were woven for their graves.

I have been accused of having obstructed the war. I admit it. Gentlemen, I abhor war. I would oppose the war if I stood alone. When I think of a cold, glittering steel bayonet being plunged in the white, quivering flesh of a human being, I recoil with horror. I have often wondered if I could take the life of a fellow man, even to save myself.

He gave the jury a rapid sketch of the personalities and principles of American minority leaders who had opposed war from 1812 on. Then he quoted a passage from Wilson's *New Freedom,* wherein the President said that the

government had fallen into the hands of "special interests." And he denounced alike Kaiserism abroad, and the exploitation of the workers in this country. And once more he defended the I. W. W. He concluded:

> If I believed in the war I could not be kept out of the first-line trenches. I would not be patriotic at long range. I would be honest enough, if I believed in bloodshed, to shed my own. But I do not believe that the shedding of blood bears any actual testimony to patriotism, to lead a country to civilization. On the contrary, I believe that warfare, in all of its forms, is an impeachment of our social order, and a rebuke to our much vaunted Christian civilization. . . .
>
> Gentlemen, I am the smallest part of this trial. I have lived long enough to appreciate my own personal insignificance in relation to a great issue that involves the welfare of the whole people. What you may choose to do to me will be of small consequence. After all, I am not on trial here. There is an infinitely greater issue that is being tried in this court, though you may not be conscious of it. American institutions are on trial here before a court of American citizens. The future will tell. . . .

When he had done at last, and sat wearily down, a Department of Justice agent turned to Karsner at the press table, and said: "You've got to hand it to the old man, he came through clean." The government counsel made their final arguments, and then there was a rush as Gene strode out of the courtroom. A girl, carrying a bouquet of red roses intended for Gene, fainted at his feet. He picked her up and carried her into the anteroom.

That night he stayed in his room in the hotel, writing letters and smoking. He said to David Karsner: "Well, this time tomorrow we shall know how much American citizens care for liberty and their Constitution." The next morning Westenhaver charged the jury that it was not

necessary to prove that the Canton speech had actually caused insubordination, mutiny, and had promoted the cause of Germany. All the jury had to decide was as to whether it was Gene's "intention" to do these things. When the jury went out at eleven o'clock, every one in the courtroom knew what their verdict would be. Gene sat at the counsel table reading telegrams from sympathizers, and talking over old days with Stedman. At six o'clock in the evening the jurors came clumping back, and their foreman answered Westenhaver's question as to their verdict, "Guilty as charged in the indictment." The Court fixed Saturday morning, September 14th, as the time for sentence.

Gene went up to Akron to stay at the home of his old friend, Mrs. Marguerite Prevy, a militant soul who was to stand by Gene to the end. There he prepared his last words to the court. Standing before Westenhaver he recalled his boyhood. He said:

> I remember all the hardships, all the privation, of that earlier day, and from that time until now, my heart has been with the working class. I could have been in Congress long ago. I have preferred to go to prison. The choice has been deliberately made. I could not have done otherwise. I have no regret. . . . I never more clearly comprehended than now the great struggle between the powers of greed on the one hand, and upon the other the rising hosts of freedom. I can see the dawn of a better day of humanity. The people are awakening. In due course of time they will come into their own. . . . I am prepared to receive your sentence.

In a long statement, Judge Westenhaver said that while he sympathized with the poor and struggling, he could not but be amazed at "the remarkable self-delusion and self-deception of Mr. Debs who assumed that he is serving hu-

manity and the down-trodden." He then pronounced sentence on Gene. Ten years at the West Virginia State Penitentiary at Moundsville.

Marguerite Prevy furnished Gene's bail of $10,000 pending his appeal. Under this he was released on the condition that he would remain at home at Terre Haute or within the jurisdiction of the northern judicial district of Ohio. In September, Gene started on a speaking tour through this district repeating what he had said at Canton and in the courtroom at Cleveland. Towards the end, the meetings were poorly attended. Fear of being seen at a Debs meeting combined with an influenza epidemic to keep attendance down. The last meetings were cancelled. On March 10, 1919, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the conviction and sentence of Gene.

CHAPTER XV

From Eugene V. Debs #9653

WHEN news of the Supreme Court's decision reached Terre Haute, Theodore Debs realized that it would fall upon him to carry on the work which Gene must drop. The home situation was desperate.

"You see our office here is almost like a national office," Theodore wrote to Upton Sinclair in November, 1918, "on account of Gene having been four times the candidate for President. It is safe to say that 95 per cent of our correspondence and other work is for the party and the movement, and yet we pay the entire expense out of our personal pocket, and since the war and the suppression of the papers with which we were connected we have no income and have had to go into debt to keep our office going and to pay our living expenses. We do not sell any leaflets, pamphlets or other printed matter, but give them away free in connection with our correspondence. This we have been more than willing to do as long as we had any income to draw on, but at this time we have had to go into debt to the extent of over a thousand dollars without income in sight. . . . We shall pull through though, and we are not going to halt or hesitate any more than we are compelled to. The war will soon be over and then we can get a fresh grip on ourselves and the situation."

Mabel Dunlap Curry, a Terre Haute Socialist, when she found that Theodore was to be left alone in the office, volunteered her services and for three years she and Theodore labored over the voluminous mail that came to Terre Haute while Gene was in jail, forwarding the most important letters to Gene, answering those that did not require his attention. The national office of the party finally sent some money. Theodore borrowed some more—the Debs credit was good in Terre Haute. And, somehow, they got along.

Gene was suffering from lumbago as word came from Washington that it was the unanimous verdict of the nine Justices of the Supreme Court that his sentence be upheld. There was no dissent about the case of Debs. That eminent dissenter, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was seventy-seven years old, read the decision. There may have come to him memories of the fighting in another war, where as a stripling he shouldered a musket. He bore wounds from Confederate bullets fired at Ball's Bluff, Antietam and Fredericksburg.

The decision reviewed Gene's Canton speech. It then referred to a previous decision (The Schenk case), where immunity from the Espionage Law, under the Constitution's First Amendment had been denied.

"The St. Louis Declaration" and Gene's approval of it were mentioned in the decision, the court saying: "Evidence that the defendant accepted this view" (the official party view), "and this declaration of his duties at the time that he made his speech is evidence that if in that speech he used words tending to obstruct the recruiting service he meant that they should have that effect. The principle is too well established and too manifestly good sense to need

citation of the books. . . . We see no sufficient reason for differing from the conclusion, but think it unnecessary to discuss the matter in detail." *

From his sick bed Gene sent out the following to the press associations:—

> The Supreme Court has dodged the issue. It has held the Espionage Law valid without affirming its constitutionality. The real issue before the court was the constitutionality of the act. This issue the Supreme Court did not dare to decide. What the Supreme Court did decide is that the Constitution is another "scrap of paper.". . . Great issues are not decided by courts, but by the people. I have no concern in what the coterie of begowned corporation lawyers in Washington may decide in my case. The court of final resort is the people, and that court will be heard from in due time.

He made everything ready for his going. Even as he went about the house on Eighth Street with Katherine at his side, there were stories in the papers that Lenin was holding two Americans for hostage for Debs and for Tom Mooney, in jail in California charged with setting off a bomb during a Preparedness Day parade in San Francisco. "Lenin has Chosen Debs as Ruler of U. S.," was a heading in a local paper. The Warren, Ohio, *Despatch* paid Gene this compliment:

> Eugene V. Debs is the most dangerous and the most formidable enemy to law and order in the country today.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* said:

> Debs's voice is now stilled as it should have been stilled long ago. Doctrines such as he has been pleased to preach are not to be tolerated. The question of free speech is in no wise involved. It is a question of national safety.

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* United States vs. Debs (Supreme Court, 714).

The *El Paso Herald*, commented:

> Perhaps upon reflection, better punishment would be to deport him to Russia and let him mingle with the Bolsheviki whom he so greatly admires.

The *New York World*, said of Gene:

> He is an erratic person, given to violence, and what prosecuting attorneys have always been reluctant to do, he on many occasions, has eagerly invited.

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District Attorney Wertz of Cleveland telephoned to Gene's home on the morning of April 12, 1919, telling Gene to come to Cleveland to surrender himself to United States Marshals who would take him to Moundsville. Wertz said that no marshals would be sent to Terre Haute.

That soft spring evening Gene and Theodore and Kate, David Karsner and Arthur Baur, Kate's brother, walked down to the Big Four station. On the way, Gene stopped to stick his head in the door of a switchman's shanty and say good-bye to a railroader friend of his. At the station a group of friends was on hand to see him off.

The reporter for the *Terre Haute Tribune* wrote: "The unconquerable spirit of Debs was evident at all times. He was apparently in the best spirits of any one present at the station, and he shook hands warmly with everybody, giving them a cheering word, and smiling bravely."

"They can't stop the movement," said Gene on the steps of his car. "You keep up on the outside and I'll keep up on the inside."

Kate went up for a parting kiss. Her last anxious words to him were: "Gene, have you got your grip?"

Grinning triumphantly, he held up his grip. He waved his hat at the crowd, shook such hands as he could reach. The train moved off.

Gene went to the Gillsy House in Cleveland, early the next morning through streets littered with handbills announcing that the local Socialists would hold a meeting that evening at which Debs would speak. That meeting was never held.

Marguerite Prevy, J. Louis Engdahl and Alfred Wagenknecht, the last two, official representatives of the party, met Gene at the hotel. When breakfast was over, United States Marshal Charles W. Lapp arrived, took Gene to the Federal Building and then hustled him into a machine which set off at breakneck speed through the Cleveland streets, ignoring all traffic regulations. In a following machine were Karsner, Wagenknecht and Engdahl.

There was an hour of furious driving and then a stop at a little suburban station where Lapp announced that the trip would be made the rest of the way in interurban trollies. The authorities, he explained, were taking no chances on a possible rescue of Gene by the workers, especially the railroad men. They rode for a while, got off, climbed aboard another trolley, and rode on. One of the party complained about this "kidnapping" of a sick, aged man. Gene said: "It's all right; let them have their inning now; we'll have ours some day."

> Debs's trolley slid across trestles, jolted and jostled along the foothills of the Alleghenies, with every now and then happy couples getting on and off the various cars on which we traveled. They were making merry on a Palm Sunday frolic. Once

I was reminded of what a barber in Terre Haute had remarked in speaking casually to a customer about Debs's impending imprisonment. "Well, it's coming along to Easter time, and we're getting ready for another crucifixion."

Late in the afternoon Debs was so weary he could hold up his head no longer. Presently it bent slowly toward his breast, and in this posture he slept as the car rocked his head from side to side. Life's grayest shadows held no sadder picture than this. We who accompanied Debs to prison shall never forget his sad and sleeping figure, with head bent on bosom, his long frame cramped in a trolley car seat, with two guards ever vigilant, moving along the Ohio Valley, with the river flowing at our right, with great earth swells arising and falling on either side like huge brown and green waves.*

Just before they reached Moundsville, Karsner asked Gene for a statement for his paper, the *Call*. Gene dictated this:

I enter the prison a flaming revolutionist—my head erect, my spirit untamed, and my soul unconquerable.

At Moundsville, Warden Joseph Z. Terrell received the prisoner, told him about the prison regulations and sent him to a receiving cell in the south wing of the prison. Terrell assured Gene's friends that the convict—Gene's number was 2253—would have good treatment, that he would be assigned to light clerical duty in the hospital. Terrell kept his word. During all the time he was in the West Virginia prison Gene received special favors, small ones, but the sort that lighten prison life.

When William Ellery Leonard, the poet, a friend of Gene's, read the stories of the trip to Moundsville, he wrote:

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* *Debs—His Authorized Life,* David Karsner, page 73.

The Old Agitator

So they could do it after all! . . .
They locked him up . . . the good old man . . .
Behind the grated window and the wall . . .
Stole in upon his sick bed . . . whisked him off
Before the rumor and the wrath began . . .
Without one woodland flower of early spring
Pressed to his big palm by some workman's child.

And, said the honest warden, welcoming:
"You're rather rangy, Mr. Debs, and tall" . . .
Embarrassed by a momentary cough . . .
"But we will fit you out as best we can" . . .
And the great Proletarian,
He straightened up and smiled.

Ten years . . . so let it be . . . he was not wise . . .
Well shut he would not . . . could not . . . keep
Those lips, close shorn and thin,
Below those keen, unflinching eyes,
And just above the unbearded fighting chin . . .
Those lips with furrows either side, so deep
From mirth and sorrow and unresting sleep . . .
And so they deemed it fit
He learn (like Jeremiah) silence in a pit.
So let it be . . . a state must have firm laws
And watchful citizens that balk
Against a wagging tongue . . .
And one grown gray and gaunt with too much talk,
Who has long since forgotten when to pause,
Or how to please,
May trip at last—even in democracies . . .
And, chiefly, if he tamper with the young,
And worship not the old divinities . . .
And when the charge is read him, clause by clause,
And he replies with scanty penitence,
He'll find (as found that worthy man
At whose incessant lips once Athens took offense)
The gentry of his latter audience
Most ominously niggard of applause . . .

And though even then he talk . . . as talk he can . . .
He lights (like Socrates) on no defense—
Except reiteration of his cause. *

Leonard spoke for thousands who up to the last moment, had not believed that Gene would be put behind the bars again. They had hoped against hope that Wilson would find it in his heart to reprieve the sentence of the old agitator, that somehow labor would use its strength, now so great in these last days of the war, to protest against this business. But labor was silent. And Wilson, who had so many words, could find none for Gene.

Gene saw the summer come across the Virginian hills from the unbarred windows of his little room in the hospital. He sat writing at a rough wooden table which had been made for him by a negro trusty who had taken Gene under his wing. This trusty scrubbed the bathtub in an alcove off Gene's room, brought Gene his huge mail, over which there were no restrictions, shared with Gene the tobacco, candy and fruit which came from sympathizers the country over.

Time and again in his letters from Moundsville, Gene refers to the kindness of all the prison officials.—Of Warden Terrell, he wrote, "He has certainly treated me as well as he possibly can under the rules of the prison which, as you know, he is expected to enforce impartially and there are not a few who would be glad to see him subject me to the severest discipline and set me at the hardest tasks. Mr. Terrell has had all regard for my health, and he has in every other way treated me not only humanely, but kindly. . . ."

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* *A Son of Earth,* William Ellery Leonard, page 152.

On the morning of June 13th Terrell came into Gene's room and told him to get his things together. Orders had come from Washington that Debs was to be transferred to the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta, Georgia. Gene said good-bye to his fellow convicts. The negro trusty was inconsolable when his friend held out a hand. He clung to Gene, he begged the Warden not to take Gene away.

They went to Atlanta in a compartment of a Pullman, Gene and his guards, and there was no word of their going. For the managers of the Western Union and Postal Telegraph in Wheeling had been instructed to take no copy dealing with the Debs case from any reporter. The censorship was not lifted until the next day, when Gene was a few hours away from Atlanta.*

At Atlanta, Warden Fred G. Zerbst supervised the registry of Gene. Zerbst had received a letter from Terrell telling of the way Gene was treated at Moundsville and urging that similar considerations be shown in the Southern penitentiary.

But Atlanta was no Moundsville, and Zerbst with an over-crowded prison, had no alternative save to put Gene into a cell occupied by five other convicts. Gene was given an ill-fitting suit of prison gray, a blue shirt, a pair of canvas sneakers, cotton socks and the prison number 9653. For five days he was locked in his cell. The rangy man had ten feet by eight of walls and bars for his world. The six inmates took turns in sweeping and washing the floors. Lines were drawn on the cell floor to mark the division of the work. Gene's other cell-mates, watching him stoop with difficulty to wield his mop, took pity on him and over his

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* *Debs,* Karsner, page 104.

heated protest, would now and then poach on Gene's preserves.

They slept on steel bunks in tiers. Thin straw mattresses were between them and the springless steel frames of their bunks. The lower bunks were, of course, most preferable, and the rule was that those who had been in the cell longest should occupy them. But a Swedish convict, a worker, insisted that Gene should have his lower bunk while he himself climbed to the top.

At the end of the fifth day, Gene was taken out more dead than alive, after his continuous confinement, and told that he would be put to work in the clothes room, whence the prison clothes were issued. There was relief for him, even in the deadliness of the routine.

At 6: 15 o'clock in the morning, bells rang in the cell block, and the convicts rose, made their beds, and waited until the cell doors were open. They went out into the corridors and marched in long blue-gray lines to the dining hall. There at small tables, they were served with coffee, bread and oatmeal. After breakfast Gene went to the clothing room in a separate building on one side of the prison yard. The room was in charge of a Seventh-Day Adventist, a conscientious objector, and a convict who knew nothing about Gene, but who sensed the difference between Gene and the other prisoners. He assigned Debs to the sewing on of buttons and the mending of socks, and this kept Gene busy until the dinner call sounded at 11: 30 A. M. Dinner consisted of "slum" (a stew of beef or mutton) or hash or beans or liver. A low-toned conversation was permitted between the convicts at their tables. Before the food was served, grace was pronounced by the prison chaplain. At noon they were back in their cells, and an hour later they

returned to their working places. At four o'clock in the afternoon there was supper of beans, bread and tea. After supper a count was taken of the prisoners in their cells, and the guards were shifted. At night the mail was distributed, and for an hour the prisoners were allowed to play on a wide assortment of musical instruments which many of them had ingeniously devised. There were improvised violins, banjos and guitars. One drug addict, who somehow had managed to smuggle in narcotics, played a cornet. When the notes came down the corridor, with beautiful clarity, the convicts would call, "Jack has had a shot." He played best when he was doped. From the cell blocks where the negro convicts were segregated, Gene could hear them singing spirituals: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot, Nobody Cares but Jesus.* At nine o'clock the lights went out.

Gene gave no hint of what they were doing to him, even in his letters to Kate and Theodore. He was allowed to write to Kate once a week, and by special permission which required the unravelling of a vast amount of red tape, to send one special letter a week, provided the subject were specified.

On Independence Day, all the prisoners had the privilege of sending special letters, and Gene wrote cheerily to Theodore: "You are the sweetest, faithfullest, darling of a brother a mortal ever had. . . . There are six of us in one cell—my five companions are the finest kind of companions, and I love them all. One is a German, one a Jew, one an Irishman, and two are Americans. They are all fine, bright fellows, and they vie with each other in being kind to me. Don't let any one send me anything as it cannot come to me under the rules. I have not received a package of any kind, nor a Socialist paper or magazine since I have

been here. Tell the comrades I cannot write to them. I am treated exactly the same as the common run of prisoners, and have no complaint on that score. The prisoner here to whom we sent a little money for tobacco about two years ago, has been very kind to me, and returned it manifold. 'Bread cast upon the waters, etc.' I am in perfect health. My spirits could not be more serene and dauntless. I calmly await the future. All's well."

But all was not well with Gene. He could not eat the prison food. He sat for hours on the edge of his cot, panting for breath in the fetid oven that was his cell. Of that time, he wrote a year later, "Summer here is fierce and relentless. I was mortally certain that it would roast the life out of me if I'd let it. It now seems like a miracle that I escaped. I was at the very edge, and leaning over, month after month. And when I came to the hospital I was as near a ghost as I shall ever be till I am one. The moment that I made up my mind that summer should not get me, the victory was won. I did not fight it or resist it; I just ignored it, paid no attention to it, let it alone, passed it by on the other side, thinking of everything imaginable except the heat of summer."

Karsner came to see him in July. "You remember what Lincoln said when at New Orleans he saw a young negress being sold on the block," he reminded Karsner. "He said, 'If I ever get a chance I'll hit at the very foundations of chattel slavery, and I'll hit it hard.' Well, if I ever get out of here alive I'll strike at the prison system harder than Lincoln ever hit at chattel slavery."

Marguerite Prevy came to Atlanta, and at her first sight of Gene went into immediate action. It was plainly evident to her that, in spite of all Gene's protestations that he was

in good health, death was very near the wasted man in the rough, convict clothing. She went immediately to the warden, who was mildly surprised at her indignation. Zerbst explained that Gene had insisted that he be treated like the other prisoners. She went to Washington, and told the truth about Gene's condition—that he was a dying man, that only his spirit was carrying him through. Clarence Darrow, who had gone along with the war and who was a power in Democratic circles, let it be distinctly understood that he would make Gene's condition known to the world, and that if Gene were any longer held practically incommunicado, and treated like a felon because, forsooth, he had dared to speak his mind, the Administration would have to answer to an aroused public opinion.

Within a few days after Mrs. Prevy's visit, Gene was called to the warden's office, and there examined by the prison physician who announced that his heart was in such a condition as to warrant Gene's being sent to the hospital. There, in a small room of his own on the top floor of the hospital building, off one of the wards, Gene spent the remainder of his days in Atlanta. To be sure, the room was barely large enough for a cot, a small table and two chairs. Its walls were bare, its floor was of cement. It was called by the grim title of "kick off" room. When a patient was dying, his cot was wheeled into one of these rooms. To Gene it seemed a true haven. Here he could read and write at leisure, there were no duties for him to perform, and he was allowed to go in the prison yard for exercise at times to suit his convenience. The hospital food, too, was of a greater variety, and was prepared in a more appetizing manner than the general run of prison food. His room was near the corner of the thirty-foot wall which marches

around the penitentiary. At night he could hear the challenges of the guards pacing the top of the wall, and at times his room was lighted by the gleams from their pocket-flashes.

Back with his books, allowed to receive word from the outside world, Gene retrieved some of his strength, but no sooner had the report circulated outside Atlanta that Gene was receiving special privileges, than the American Legion and other patriotic organizations demanded that he be returned to the cell block and set to work again. This demand was not complied with. Wilson, however, was unyielding when, from all parts of the country, there came appeals for Gene's release. One day, Gene made a slighting reference to the President in the course of an interview with a reporter for an Atlanta paper. Immediately Gene's privileges were removed, and he was again cut off from the outer world. All letters sent to him from friends and party officials were returned to the senders unopened. Gene was permitted to write no letter home. He did manage to get through the following to Theodore: "To be completely cut off from the outer world as I am now, is next to suffocation and being buried alive, but I am not going to let even that touch my spirit. I can and shall hold out to the end without concession or compromise, clean through without a shadow of weakening or hint of betrayal, and that is what I know you want me to do and expect me to do."

3

Wilson's hatred for Gene Debs was sinister and sustained. Of all the war heretics it is evident he most abominated Gene. There must have fallen in those days across

the path of the professing liberal in the White House, the shadows of men manacled to bars, men slugged by prison guards, men tortured in unspeakable manner, because during war times they had taken seriously those ideals which Wilson had preached in times of peace. None of these shadows lay more hatefully, it would appear, than the long one of the old radical who, during his trial, had read aloud the fine words of *The New Freedom.* Wilson the scholar, Wilson the historian and interpreter of American liberalism, knew very well that Gene's position was firm-rooted in the best of American liberal traditions. He knew that it was Wilson, not Debs, who had deserted every fundamental of liberalism. To rationalize his adherence to a war policy of which he had never been certain, to bolster up his decision to abandon his peace-time philosophy, it was necessary for Wilson to stifle every dissident in his path. He had no love for hearing his conscience articulate on the lips of others.

And so, seeing in Debs the authentic spokesman for the peace lovers of the earth that Woodrow Wilson might have been, the President played cat-like with the 64-year-old man whom he had penned up at Atlanta.

One day a keeper thrust into Gene's hand a paper headed "In re Application for Executive Clemency of Eugene V. Debs," and reading: "You are informed that the papers in the above-entitled case have been submitted to the Attorney-General and by him to the President, and that the President, on January 30, 1921, denied the application. The case is therefore disposed of and the papers have been placed on the files of the Department. . . ."

Gene sent the paper to Theodore, with this comment: "Please save this. It is a document that will some time be

of interest. There is just one thing wrong with it. I never made application for clemency. I have seen many a man since I have been here, receive one of these, turn pale and almost faint away. It sealed his fate perhaps for life. Please make a little note, and send it to Otto B.* to the effect that I have been officially notified that *my* application for clemency has been denied. But there is a slight mistake in the matter as I never honored the Wilson Administration with an application for clemency or anything else."

Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's secretary, wrote a series of articles on Wilson which appeared in the Atlanta *Journal*. Gene clipped out the following paragraph from Tumulty's story:

> One of the things to which he paid particular attention at this time was the matter of the pardon of Eugene V. Debs. The day that the recommendation for pardon arrived at the White House, he looked it over and examined it carefully, and said: "I will never consent to the pardon of this man. I know that in certain quarters of the country there is a popular demand for the pardon of Debs, but it shall never be accomplished with my consent. Were I to consent to it, I should never be able to look into the faces of the mothers of this country who sent their boys to the other side. While the flower of American youth was pouring out its blood to vindicate the cause of civilization, this man, Debs, stood behind the lines, sniping, attacking and denouncing them. Before the war he had a perfect right to exercise his freedom of speech and to express his own opinion, but once the Congress of the United States declared war, silence on his part would have been the proper course to pursue. I know there will be a great deal of denunciation of me for refusing this pardon. They will say I am cold-blooded and indifferent, but it will make no impression on me. This man was a traitor to his country, and he will never be pardoned during my administration."

* Otto Branstetter, National Secretary of the Socialist Party.

All the petitions for Gene were sent to Wilson without Debs's knowledge, for the most part, and certainly without his consent. Gene wrote to Theodore:

> The National Executive Board of the Socialist Party at its Detroit meeting decided to renew appeal to Wilson in my behalf. This must not be done. Under no circumstances will I permit any further appeal to the White House for me unless it is done over my protest. I have written notice to that effect to be sent to Branstetter. You will find it enclosed. Please tell him I appreciate the kindly interest of the executive committee, but that I emphatically object to any further appeal to the present occupant of the White House in my behalf. There has been appeal enough and to spare and I don't propose to have my comrades and friends stultify themselves in a vain appeal to deaf ears and a heart of adamant. I have nothing to ask at the hands of President Wilson—nothing at all, and I can stay here to the limit and I want my comrades to believe I can and give themselves no concern on my account. I'm not suffering standing true in a righteous cause. I'd suffer only if I betrayed it the weight of an atom or the breadth of a hair.

The denial of Gene's pardon was one of the last official acts of the sick man in the White House. Two years and two months after the end of the war, Wilson could not find it in his heart to forgive Gene Debs his dreams of peace and a new freedom.

4

In the meantime, what of the Socialist Party? It was the question most constantly on Gene's mind. When Joseph M. Coldwell, a Rhode Island Socialist organizer, who had been sentenced to Atlanta for three years for opposing the war, first met Debs in the prison yard, Gene fell on him with a thousand questions. Coldwell had no comforting

news. What Walter Weyl called "the war beneath the war, a war of the poor and exploited of all the world against all exploiters, big and little, respectable and disreputable," * knew no armistice. It raged more fiercely than ever, at the very time when the diplomats gathered at Versailles.

In a report on the activities of A. Mitchell Palmer's Department of Justice from 1919 to 1920, twelve leading lawyers among them, Zechariah Chaffee, Jr., Felix Frankfurter, Jackson Ralston, Francis Fisher Kane, Roscoe Pound, and Frank P. Walsh, said:

> To the American people: For more than six months, we the undersigned lawyers, whose sworn duty it is to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States, have seen with growing apprehension the continued violation of the Constitution and breaking of those laws by the Department of Justice of the United States government.
>
> Under the guise of a campaign for the suppression of radical activities, the office of the Attorney-General, acting by its local agents throughout the country, and giving express instructions from Washington, has committed illegal acts. Wholesale arrests both of aliens and citizens have been made without warrant or any process of law; men and women have been jailed and held incommunicado without access of friends or counsel; homes have been entered without search-warrant and property seized and removed; other property has been wantonly destroyed; workingmen and working-women suspected of radical views have been shamefully abused and maltreated. Agents of the Department of Justice have been introduced into radical organizations for the purpose of informing upon their members or inciting them to activities; these agents have even been instructed from Washington to arrange meetings upon certain dates for the express object of facilitating wholesale raids and arrests. In support of these illegal arrests and to create sentiment in its favor, the Department of Justice has also constituted itself

* *The End of the War,* Walter Weyl, page 184.

> a propaganda bureau, and has sent to newspapers and magazines of this country quantities of material designed to excite public opinion against radicals, all at the expense of the government and outside the scope of the Attorney-General's duties.*

Those were the days when the Buford sailed for Russia with 249 deported persons on board, when approximately 10,000 persons were arrested on vague charges of radicalism, when elected New York Socialist Assemblymen were being unseated at Albany, when the notorious Lusk Committee was inciting violent raids on the offices of the *New York Call* and the Rand School.

And in that time, too, occurred the inevitable splitting of the Socialist Party. No longer could the moderates satisfy the revolutionaries with programs of political action, Fabianism, evolutionary progress. The radicals had the Russian Revolution before their eyes. In May, 1919, the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party expelled seven Left-Wing, foreign-language federations, thereby deliberately cutting off one-third of the party membership. By this time, these federations, Lettish, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Ukrainian and South Slavic, had come to places of importance in the party councils. Their ousting was the signal for a general exodus of the left-wingers. Among these were many who had rendered long and devoted service to the party, Margaret Prevy, Alfred Wagenknecht, Charles Ruthenberg, L. E. Katterfeld, Arne Swabeck, and Ludwig Lore. John Reed, Max Eastman, Albert Rhys Williams and other writing men, some of whom had seen the Revolution at first-hand, captured many of the younger Socialists. They saw Freedom slugged to her knees in America. They believed that

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* *Labor and Farmer Parties,* Nathan Fine, page 353.

she had taken up her dwelling-place in this new Russia under Communism.

With the foreign-language federations for nuclei, the bolters formed various Communist organizations, all acknowledging a Russian inspiration. Within a short time there were more Communist bodies in the United States than in any other country in the world. Schisms, fierce credal conflicts became the order of the day among the Communists. Only when it came to attacks upon the Socialist Party could they find common cause. It was agreed that Socialists, committed to political action, must first be eliminated before a revolution could be made in America. From that time to the present, the Communists, however divided, have devoted most of their energies to this end. The Communist thesis, then and now, is that the first steps towards a proletarian dictatorship in America are over the body of a defunct Socialist Party.

Gene listened to these reports brought him by Coldwell and by visitors from both camps with bewilderment and deep concern. "It has been the fate of our movement from the beginning," he wrote to Theodore in the spring of 1920, "especially in this country, to split. About the time we get in shape to do something we have to split up and waste our energy in factional strife. We preach unity everlastingly, but we ourselves keep splitting apart."

Gene had sent to the *New York Call* and other Socialist papers on the first anniversary of his imprisonment, in April, 1920, an urgent appeal for unity in the party. "I do not believe there is any issue," he wrote, "that divided the Socialists that cannot also reunite them. There is no real difference among the rank and file of Socialists, the real contentions very likely lie in the different leadership

of the different groups. The Socialist movement must rise to the occasion this year and unite the industrial and political wings in harmonious alliance with the forces of evolution. If we do not so unite, and compose ourselves, we shall fail as Socialists supposed to be dedicated to the supreme purpose of delivering mankind from darkness to light."

His words fell on deaf ears. He was in no position to understand the nature of the quarrel between Socialist and Communist. It had about it all the bitterness of a feud within a family. There was no chance for composing the fundamental differences between those who still had faith in democratic processes and those who had no patience for politics.

The country as a whole longed for a return from that chilled and rarified atmosphere, whither Wilson had led them, to the valleys of "business as usual," and they hailed the appearance of Warren Gamaliel Harding with his talk of normalcy. It was evident in the first days of 1920 that any Republican could defeat Wilson.

David Karsner, who was Gene's most frequent visitor at Atlanta, set all doubts aside as to whom the Socialists would nominate when, in the *Call* of March 14th, he published a story headed, "Debs Agrees to be Candidate." Karsner went to Gene with a document certifying that Gene's name had been correctly placed on a proof ballot to be voted on at the Presidential primary in Michigan. Gene's signature to this was indication that he would accept the nomination.

To the old cry of "Debs! Debs! We want Debs!" the Socialists, convening in New York, nominated Convict 9653 for President of the United States on May 13, 1920.

It was an emotional, hair-trigger convention. It sang the

"JOURNEY'S END"

The official Socialist campaign poster of 1920

Internationale, and the *Marseillaise* and piled roses in front of a life-sized portrait of Gene on the stage.

Seymour Stedman, who had been nominated for Vice-President, James Oneal and Julius Gerber went to Atlanta to notify Gene of his nomination.

Oneal wrote of that strange ceremony:

> Debs was the coolest man in the prison. Never was there anything like this. A man dressed in the garb of a convict, caged behind prison bars, being notified that he was the choice of a political party to occupy the office of the man who was largely responsible for his being in jail. The atmosphere, especially during the period when we were waiting for Debs to be conducted into the office of Warden Zerbst, was painful. It is impossible to describe the emotional tension which we labored under as the minutes dragged while we waited.
>
> But Debs himself relieved the tension as he appeared down the corridor talking earnestly to the guard who accompanied him into the warden's office. So far as Debs was concerned we were meeting him in his own home. With difficulty his friends—there were others present besides the committee—regained their composure after the first greetings, and we proceeded with the formalities of the notification and acceptance.

The *New York Call* from the day that Gene was imprisoned, had been running excerpts from Gene's speeches headed, "Though Jailed, He Speaks." Under the editorial direction of Charles W. Ervin, that paper now took up the bulk of the propaganda work of the campaign. Though the party was sadly demoralized by factional difficulties, it did get speakers out to help Stedman and other wheel horses of Socialism. Many of these speakers were arrested, Socialist meetings broken up; but by now it was evident that the "reign of terror" of Mitchell Palmer was about ended.

A million Americans, that fall, voted for a man in a convict's uniform behind the bars at Atlanta.

5

Before Gene's nomination, a newspaper article had intimated that if he would make some gesture of repentance, modifying his position of opposition to the status quo, there might be a chance for his pardon. To Karsner, who showed him the article, Gene exclaimed:

> Repent! Repent! Repent for standing like a man! For having a conviction about a public question, and standing by it and for the cause! Why, before I would don the sackcloth and get down into the ashes before the Attorney-General or any man on earth for having a principle, I would gladly walk to the gallows or the stake. If I should do such a thing as that the barbaric tortures of the Inquisition would be too good for me.
>
> No! Not in a thousand years shall I repent for a single principle that I possess. They are dearer to me than liberty, than life itself.*

Gene did not expect from Harding any more leniency than he had received from Wilson. He wrote to Theodore:

> Wilson says he will not let me out. Harding has already said he wouldn't, so it looks as if I shall not see you till December 28th, 1925. My sentence expires on that day if I do not lose my "good time" which reduces a sentence by a third. Good-bye! if it's so written in the stars. . . . Yes, something beyond me has kept me alive here. If it had been myself alone, I would not have lived a month. I was nearer dead than alive anyway after all the hounding and persecution. Something outside of me and outside of the prison has sustained me, and will to the end, and I am as conscious of the fact as I am that I am alive. People think I am brave and unconquerable. It is not I at all, save in a very small way. It is their spirit which makes me so and this only because of the common cause that animates us all and pushes us into the conflict where we have to fight for it or die.

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* *Debs,* Karsner, page 3.

When Gene thus resigned himself to the full term of his sentence, he had not reckoned with the new order of things in the White House. Harding and his Ohio followers were in far closer touch with the hearts and minds of the wayfaring men of the country than was ever Wilson with all his libertarian affirmations. There was, to begin with, the vote for Gene, and no Mid-West politician underestimated the significance of a million votes cast for a convict. There was the constant agitation from radicals of all hues for Gene's release: an agitation that threatened the nice balance of "normalcy." From unexpected quarters, there came intimations to Harding that there was wisdom in pardoning the old agitator. The widow of Champ Clark, for instance, pleaded for Gene's pardon when Harding came to see her to offer his condolences on the death of her husband. Hardly a day passed but what Harding had some word of a very real sentiment on Gene's behalf in high places and low. The poets had their say. In his poem *The Last Christian,* Witter Bynner began his eloquent plea:

> In the name of your dead faith, I plead with you,
> Because you once believed, you and your fathers,
> In a Galilean madman's wanderings
> And thought the world might be redeemed by them,
> Be lenient to this only Christian left,
> A solitary last old man, believing! . . .

Harding, kindly and easy-going, was instinctively for releasing Gene. But pressures brought by the American Legion and other implacable organizations, which had no wish to forget the war, held him back. To Gene's friends outside, it seemed, as though under Harding the prospects for the release of their beloved were still remote.

In his hospital room, Gene wrote on the backs of the en-

velopes of the hundreds of letters, which came to him, long-hand instructions to Theodore for their answers. He read, for the first time, straight through the Bible, and concluded: "The Jehovah of the ancient Jews is just as monstrous to my mind as He ever was—He bears no remotest resemblance to my Love-God."

In his cell at Moundsville, he had a picture of the Christ hung on the wall. Among his first visitors at Atlanta were two ministers. "They came," Gene said, "at different times, but on the same mission—to save my soul. They both wanted to know what religion I profess. I told them that their churches and their theologies were not for me.—I have no use for them. Their tendencies are not to serve, but to enslave. To conceal, rather than reveal the true and vital significance of the Sermon on the Mount." *

For the first time in many years, watching the march of the seasons along the fields beyond the prison walls, Gene had the opportunity for communion with himself. He wrote to Theodore:

> As to the struggle with self, it is not a lack of frankness or fairness. I wish I could tell you about it, but I can't even tell myself. I don't know the *why* of it. It is a sort of mental and spiritual reaction and at times it comes with pitiless severity. It is not new save in degree. I suppose it is because I *see* the heights I must *feel* the depths, and they precisely correspond in extent. There are moments when all the ecstasies of the soul are mine and others when I see all that is darkest, feel all that is bitterest and see all that is most saddening and shocking to my sensibilities, and in the struggle to escape that ensues I feel myself undergoing a species of purging by fire as if I had that in me that sinned against my soul and indicted my manhood. I think Lincoln must have known something of this when he said that if there was anyone in purgatory who suffered more than he

* *Debs,* David Karsner, page 10.

did he pitied him. During these periods of moral pregnancy and travail, for such they are, it seems to me that my heart is the very heart and centre of all the sadness and sorrow, all the pain and misery, and all the suffering and agony in the world. I don't know why it is so. I only know that deep melancholy is so completely a part of me, and I have so often been under its chastening influence, that it has become sacred to me, and costly as it is, I should not wish it taken out of my life.

He felt himself one with the humblest of the prisoners who pressed around him as he went through the prison yard talking eagerly with Coldwell and the other radicals in Atlanta, about plans for unifying the party. The hardest of these convicts softened under his smile. There was Sam Moore, a huge Negro lifer, who time and again had been put away in the "hole" for infractions of the rules. He was a child in Gene's hands. When the authorities asked Moore what had happened to him, he said that Gene was the first man in all his experience to show him any affection.

There flowed from Gene behind the walls of Atlanta, the same magnetic love that drew men to him in the world outside.

"I suppose it is a difficult thing to distinguish greatness in men and women until they are safely dead," said George Bernard Shaw in an interview with Joseph Gollomb in March, 1920. "So that we shouldn't be too hard on America for not realizing that it is her great men and women that are being sent to prison and that it is the small men and a big mob that are sending them there. Yet, I don't understand how the stupidest neighbor of a man like Eugene Debs can fail to realize the greatness of his heart. I can feel the warmth of it here, nearly four thousand miles away."

It was this warmth that broke the bitterness of Sam

Moore, that brought the convicts to Gene as the children in the world outside had come to his luminous presence certain of his love. When they heard that he had been nominated for President, they were sure that he would be released. Gene was finally forced to take his exercise at times when the yard was nearly empty, so many requests were made of him to write letters, to fill out parole blanks, to settle fights, to use his influence to obtain commutations.

A reporter asked Father Michael Byrne, the prison chaplain, the secret of Gene's hold over the prisoners. "He just loves them," said the chaplain, "he talks to them and then they are different. There is something about him that wins and changes them."

Coldwell was a cripple, a free spirit with a grim humor. He was assigned to wash out the tin dippers, small and large, from which the slum was ladled. So that he could see Gene when the latter came down for exercise, Coldwell would take his utensils to a sunny corner in the yard, outside the kitchen. He informed Gene that he was the official prison astronomer in charge of the big and little dippers. Pretty soon, Coldwell found that he was performing much the same functions as were once those of the absent Theodore in sheltering Gene from the importunities of this new rank and file. When it was intimated that Coldwell could secure a pardon, he said gruffly that he "would stick around as long as Gene Debs was in jail."

On the first of May, revolutionary labor, the world over, pledges loyalty to its proletarian philosophy. Coldwell got together the radicals in the penitentiary, gave them little red ribbons to wear and when the convicts came out to exercise on May 1, 1920, the class-war prisoners,

Industrial Workers of the World, Communists, Socialists, grouped together and with Gene and Coldwell leading, sang:

> Come dungeons dark or gallows grim,
> This song shall be our parting hymn.

As they thundered the defiant strains of *The Red Flag*, the guards looked on in silence and a strange excitement ran through the listening convicts understanding little of the philosophy of the singers but sensing, perhaps, that there were wings beating above the high-walled yard.

"Just in from the stockade," Gene wrote to Theodore. "The band, all convicts, playing some sweet, heart-touching strains. Near two thousand of us convicts pressed closely about the stand. I hope God was looking that way. Faces furrowed deep with pain and sorrow and seamed and scarred with sin and shame! White faces, black faces, boys' faces! A young convict, a mere child, mounted the stand and sang the sweetness of his boyish soul into the hungering hearts of that sublimely great aggregation and his fellow-convicts. A solemn hush fell upon the intensely dramatic scene. It is etched upon my consciousness as vividly as if traced in living flame. Again the faces! Prison pallor touched to life again! Lips quivering and tears trembling on the sunken cheeks of sad faces! I saw and felt it all. Strange, weird, ghastly, touchingly beautiful, and infinitely appealing and pathetic! My heart stilled its breathing, and deep within me a convict bowed and wept."

Suddenly, in the spring of 1921, there came from the outside world a summons for Gene. The warden called him into his office, told him that he was to go alone and unguarded to Washington. That there he was to see

Attorney-General Harry M. Daugherty. That nothing was to be said to any one about this journey. The warden gave Gene a return trip ticket to Washington. And that night, a tall, pale, man, dressed in civilian clothes, went aboard a sleeper at Atlanta.

The next day, Convict Number 9653 stood before the Attorney-General. Gene kept the promise that he had made to the warden. He never revealed the conversation between himself and Daugherty. No word of his visit appeared until weeks later. He came back to Atlanta as he had gone, alone and unguarded. He shared with no one the hopes which must have arisen within him. There were rumors, however, that could not be downed, that Harding planned to pardon Gene. Some ten days before Christmas, 1921, Theodore left Terre Haute for Atlanta. There he was joined by Karsner, Sam Castleton, an Atlanta lawyer, Celia Rotter, who had been at the forefront of the Socialists working for Gene's pardon, Mildred Morris and Charles Sweeny, the latter two, newspaper reporters, sympathizers with Gene who had confidential word that there might be news in Atlanta.

There was much telephoning between Theodore and the warden. Much maneuvering on the part of those closest to Gene to prevent any premature announcement which might upset the plans of the authorities. On the icy-cold morning of Christmas day, Theodore, in answer to a telephone call, drove out to the Federal Prison. Behind him came Karsner, and the others in Castleton's automobile. Theodore went in and found his brother talking with Warden J. E. Dyche, Zerbst's successor. They told Theodore that Harding had commuted the ten-year sentence, and that Gene was a free man. They breakfasted together in the

warden's office, Gene still in his prison clothes, while the reporters outside shivered in the cold. Then Gene changed into a suit of dark brown, struggled into a fantastically abbreviated overcoat, took his five dollars, the final gift of the prison, and went about saying good-bye to his friends. The last to shake his hand was Sam Moore, sobbing like a baby.

Gene, Theodore, the warden and a deputy, walked past the open steel doors and into the reservation between the prison entrance and the street. Midway they were halted by a sudden thunderous sound from the cell blocks behind them. They wheeled round, staring. The convicts were shouting their farewell to Gene, "feeling themselves free for the moment at least, they let loose again and again in roars of farewell salutation." Gene said of that amazing good-bye, "my heart almost ceased to beat. I felt myself overwhelmed with painful and saddening emotions. The impulse seized me to turn back. I had no right to leave. Those tearful, haunting faces, pressing against the barred prison windows—how they appealed to me—and accused me!

"But I had to go. As I stepped into the waiting car and waved my last farewell, another mighty shout was heard. And then another and another and still another, until far, far up the winding road and far from the terrible prison, the last faint echo of the convict host that wept as it cheered, died away in the distance."

6

Before he could go home at last to Kate, there was a visit that he had promised to make. Harding had let it be known that he wanted to see Debs.

The President was alone in the executive office in the White House, when Gene came in. Gene stood by the door for a moment, looking across the room at Harding. "I'm Eugene Debs," he said. The President stood up, went around his desk, and holding out his hand, exclaimed: "I'm glad to see you at last, Mr. Debs, I've heard so damn much about you." The door was shut on those waiting in the hall. No official report of the interview between these two men was ever given out. For twenty minutes, Harding, the genial, perplexed, small-town bourgeois, who loved nothing better than a shirt-sleeved poker game with the boys in the back room, tried to fathom what there was in the spirit of the gaunt proletarian aristocrat across the desk from him which had brought Gene unbroken through every ordeal.

A long time after that talk, Gene hinted as to its subject. Gene, it seems, had told Harding of conditions at Atlanta which he felt needed immediate reformation.

And his last words with the President were a plea for the pardon of Sam Moore.

CHAPTER XVI

CAPTAIN OF HIS SOUL

A RED glare lighted the evening skies above Terre Haute as Gene's train from the East came to a halt a full quarter-mile from the station. Karsner, leaning far out of a car window, peering into the darkness ahead, saw the locomotive headlight play across a thousand faces.

"The whole State of Indiana is out here," he called back to Gene and Theodore.

They had brushed past the police in the station shed and gone out onto the tracks, men, women and children, wearing red badges and holding up red flares, welcoming Gene home.

The moment Gene stepped on the car platform, hands reached up, he was swung off the train and onto the shoulders of the men below. A truck covered with red bunting was waiting and into it, coal diggers and railroaders and factory workers hoisted Gene. The flash powders of the photographers boomed. One band crashed into the *Marseillaise*, another the *International*, another *Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here*. Gene waved his hat and the truck crawled off along the few short blocks from the station to the North Eighth Street home where Kate was waiting.

The following crowd ran over little David Karsner, clutching Gene's bag. A miner lifted him up and plumped him over the fence at the back of Gene's house. For blocks

around the house, the crowds milled, trying to get near the tall man standing on the front porch. Mayor Hunter of Terre Haute, attempted a short speech. The crowds shouted, "Debs! Debs! We Want Debs!"

Flowers were passed up over the porch railing. A ten-year-old girl came up to Gene with red roses in her hands. The door behind him opened and Katherine came out. Gene turned and kissed her before all those waiting thousands. It was the first embrace between them for three long years, for Kate had never come to Atlanta.

Then Gene with Kate, standing straight and proud beside him, said:—

"I am glad to be home again. But I do not feel that I am yet free. I still have a duty to perform, and that is to work for the freedom of the prisoners in that place at Atlanta. I am thankful for the untiring efforts of my friends in working for my release. No matter what our opinions may be politically, I still have love for my fellow men. My imprisonment has not embittered me. On the contrary, it has incited me to do more for those who are confined behind prison bars. It is beyond me to express my feelings at this time. My heart is too full of gratitude as I look on this crowd of people who have waited for my return. Perhaps many of you are here out of curiosity; but I feel within my heart that the majority of those here are my friends. All I can say is I am glad that there are so many in Terre Haute who have not forgotten the principles for which I stand. Good night."

He went with Kate into the house behind him.

The next day, the *Terre Haute Tribune* said:—

"Gene Debs came home last night and was accorded a

Debs' favorite cartoon, by his friend Ryan Walker

welcome seldom given either to heroes of war or victors of peace."

2

At the age of sixty-six, enfeebled by imprisonment, his physical being sorely shattered, his spirit indomitable as ever, Gene buckled on his armor and went out on a new crusade. This was nothing less that a war upon all prisons. With the great sound of the farewell of the convicts at Atlanta still ringing in his ears, he struck his blow at the penal system which had shocked him even as Lincoln had been shocked by the sight of slavery in action.

While he was still in Atlanta, representatives of the Bell Syndicate of New York came to him proposing that he write a series of articles describing his prison experiences. He leaped at the offer for he saw in it as he frankly said, "an opportunity to give the general public certain information in regard to the prison, based upon my personal observation and experience, that I hoped might result in some beneficial changes in the management of prisons and in the treatment of their inmates."

No sooner was he home than he sent for David Karsner to help him write the articles. For a month in Gene's workroom in the North Eighth Street house the two worked away, Gene striding up and down the floor his voice quivering with anger over some remembered injustice to a fellow convict, or thundering condemnation of the entire system, while Karsner wrote furiously.

Gene was "dancing in chains," however, and he chafed at the thought. He had promised the head of the syndicate that there would be no "propaganda" in his articles. It was

a rash promise to come from the inveterate propagandist. Time and again Karsner would have to stop Gene when the latter was in full flight, damning the system that tried to forget its victims by hiding them away in prisons.

"The prison as a rule, to which there are few exceptions, is for the poor. The owning and ruling classes hold the keys of the prison the same as they do of the mill and mine. They are the keepers of both and their exploited slaves are the inmates and victims of both." Thus Gene. And Karsner's pencil would stop and Karsner would look quizzically across at the tall, bald man who was crouched over pleading with an audience that was not in the room.

"What's the matter, Dave?" Gene would ask with his forefinger poised, "Oh! you figure that's propaganda, eh? Well, damn it, it's the truth isn't it?"

The articles when they appeared were headed: "The views expressed in this article and in the others of this series are those of Eugene V. Debs and not of the Bell Syndicate, Inc. Mr. Debs has agreed not to insert any political propaganda into the articles."

The result, of course, was a stilted, colorless series which came to a sudden stop after but nine of the originally planned twelve articles had appeared. Even so, the syndicate received numerous complaints about "propaganda."

Gene was irked at this and in the year of his death, he published under the imprint of the Socialist Party, his first and only full length book, *Walls and Bars*. In this he propagandized to his heart's content. He said that it was plain enough why capitalist papers did not want his articles as he would have written them.

> Well does the capitalist press know that the naked truth about our foul prison system would be the deadliest kind of 'political

propaganda' against the capitalist system which created and is responsible for that festering evil, and against the equally foul political parties which uphold capitalism and perpetuate its corrupt and criminal misrule.*

At the front of *Walls and Bars* Gene printed:

My Prison Creed

While there is a lower class I am in it;
While there is a criminal element I am of it;
While there's a soul in prison I am not free.

In an article which appeared in the *Century Magazine* in July, 1922, while the liberal Glen Frank was editor, Gene outlined his immediate demands for prison reform, though he contended that in the long run the prison "ought not merely to be reformed but abolished as an institution for the punishment and degradation of unfortunate human beings."

Gene would have taken prison supervision out of the hands of politicians and placed it under direction of "a board of the humanest of men with vision and understanding." This board, he believed, should have absolute control, including the power of pardon, parole and commutation. He would have abolished the contract system, paid prisoners for their labor "at the prevailing rate of wages which should be placed to their credit in the books of the institution or shared with their families." "Not a gun nor a club should be in evidence inside the walls." He would have prisoners regulate their own conduct under supervision of the prison board and give them some measure of self-government.

* *Walls and Bars*, page 21.

3

Prisons, and then the tangled affairs of his party, beaten to its knees by attacks from extremists among reactionaries and radicals alike. How did Gene stand? Would it be Communism with all its emphasis on the class-struggle or Socialism underscoring political action? For months after his release he was besieged by representatives of the various Communist groups most of whom had "gone underground." The Communists at that time adopted a ritual of secrecy, with countersigns and codes, and a revolutionary jargon taken over from the days when in Russia many of them had plotted against the Czar. They gave as reason for this, the hounding of the police and the activities of *agents provocateur.*

This business, appealing as it might have been to the romantic youngsters in the Communist ranks, was repulsive to Gene. He had no stomach for secrecy, for plots and counter-plots. He carried over his antipathy from the brotherhood days.

When the Bolshevists began their persecutions of the Social Revolutionaries, Gene was aroused, together with Socialists the world over. He sent this cablegram to Lenin:

> I protest with all civilized people in the name of our common humanity against the execution of any of the Social Revolutionaries or the unjust denial of their liberty. Soviet Russia can set an example by refusing to follow the practices of worldwide czardom, and should uphold the higher standards we seek to erect and profess to observe.

He who had hailed the Russian Revolution, who had cried: "I am a Bolshevik from the crown of my head to the

tips of my toes," watched the development of the revolution through troubled eyes. The tactics of the American Communists he soon learned were those of ruthless intolerance towards those who deviated in a single instance from their rigid creed. The dictatorial De Leon seemed mild in comparison with the strutting young Communists who came to Terre Haute to lecture the old agitator on his revolutionary duties.

Shortly after his cablegram to Lenin he made his decision clear. He was a Socialist and no Communist. He was a revolutionist, but the revolution he envisaged was in the hearts and minds of men. It was to come to America through peaceful and democratic methods, not by fire and sword.

4

In the diary that he kept during his stay with Gene at Terre Haute,* Karsner makes frequent mention of Gene's weakened physical condition.

Gene's heart was seriously affected. He suffered more and more frequently from griping attacks which had first assailed him at Atlanta. He said to Karsner:

> In those spells I could have died at any moment had I yielded to the invitation extended to me. But I was determined not to die in the penitentiary and I would not have succumbed there had I served my full ten-year sentence. Naturally, I am anxious to live now. All I need is time to rest and relax and then I shall be ready for the fray and the war dance.

But they would not give him rest, those who were insistent that he enter the fray without any breathing spell.

---

* *Talks with Debs in Terre Haute,* David Karsner.

Finally, he fled their importunities. He left Terre Haute and the mountainous mail and the clanging bells and went to Bermuda with Kate. His stay there was short. He quoted his friend Horace Traubel who had said on his deathbed: "I am tired, damned tired," in a letter to Karsner from the Lindlahr Sanitarium at Elmhurst, a suburb of Chicago, where he had gone in the summer of 1922. And Gene added "You are too young to know what that means. I do! I try to get rested, but it's not easy. Yesterday the visitors came in a steady stream and were here until I went to bed."

He saw his party make alliance with the La Follette forces in the campaign of 1924. When that alliance fell to pieces immediately after the election, he begged the railroad leaders who had been part of it to help the Socialists form a labor party. They whirled their watch-chains over ample stomachs, looked curiously at the man who had organized their brotherhoods so many years ago and then, mumbling apologies, they went heavily from the hall to their hotel. Gene made a speech to the Socialists in Carmen's Hall in Chicago urging them to take courage and keep up the fight.

For his part, the struggle for mere existence grew fiercer. For days he lay in bed fighting against the violence of a pounding heart. In the summer of 1926 he went again to Lindlahr. He knew then that the end was near. He reminisced with the few friends who were allowed to see him. There was talk of railroading days, of the coming of the troops to Chicago, of the bayonets in Colorado. No bitterness was left in him. He read a newspaper article denouncing him and concluding, "Of course, Debs should not have been released. His utterances prove it. He will cause the

death of many another and better man before he is done." He smiled, but had no comment.

Theodore was there and his sisters and Gene sat with them in the long shadows of the trees on the lawn behind the sanatorium saying little, looking at something the others could not see.

In October, the physicians ordered their seventy-one-year-old patient to his bed. He went unwillingly. Whenever there was no one about he walked the halls. One day he found a girl, whose case had been pronounced hopeless, weeping near his room. He tried to comfort her. He spoke of Henley's brave *Invictus*. She begged him to write some lines of the poem for her. Theodore brought her this verse written in Gene's graceful longhand:

> It matters not how strait the gate,
> How charged with punishments the scroll,
> I am the master of my fate:
> I am the captain of my soul.

Gene fell into a coma. For five days they bent anxiously above that great heart of his, the physicians certain that it had stopped. On the fifth day, October 20, 1926, the heart beat no more. Gene died with his hand in Theodore's.

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